THE MARPLOT

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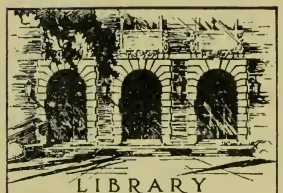

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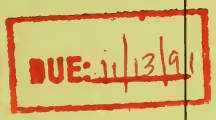

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THE MARPLOT

THE MARPLOT

BY

SIDNEY ROYSE LYSAGHT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

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THE MARPLOT

PART I

CHAPTER I

A SHIP COMES HOME

Professor Wintersea returned from his early walk across Hyde Park one morning in a very happy frame of mind. A problem relating to perfectly elastic solids, which had been perplexing him for ten days, had suddenly grown clear to him, and he was looking forward to the pleasure of transferring his solution to paper after breakfast. So occupied had he been with his problem during the last two days that he had forgotten his letters; but at breakfast this morning he

allowed himself the relaxation of reading them,—fixing them open in a vacant division of the toast rack so that he might enjoy them without exacting from his hands that attention which they owed to the meal. The perusal of one of these letters changed the expression of contentment on his face to one of anguish. It came from a distant connection, a Mr. Wrixon, who lived alone with a brother in a half-ruined house on the borders of Somerset and Devon ; it reminded him painfully of a fact which he had endeavoured to forget—that he was one of the guardians of two children ; it informed him that a ship called the *Candia* bearing these children and their mother from India was expected to arrive in London either on that day or the next, and asked him to meet them and superintend their departure

for the west. Mr. Wrixon remarked that it would be a good opportunity for the Professor to make the acquaintance of his wards.

These were a boy and a girl, children of a Captain Malory, a cousin who had been a friend of his boyhood. Professor Wintersea being the only relation Captain Malory possessed with whom he had not quarrelled, had been appointed as one of the children's guardians; and though the office bristled with terrors for the shy student, he had been too good natured to refuse to act. He had endeavoured to forget. But now the hour of his trial had come. He was deeply moved; the news was full of unpleasant suggestions: those of business responsibility, of a multitude of dreaded and difficult duties.

'Dear me! Bless my soul!' he ex-

claimed, 'this is very distressing — very inopportune.'

The immediate task before him was also uncongenial. He feared children, especially growing boys, almost as much as he feared young ladies who were already full grown. He remembered that he would have to give up his morning's work; but the Professor was an unselfish gentleman, and the thought that he might be guilty of the discourtesy of keeping a lady waiting on the steamer, while he was indulging in perfectly elastic solids, was even more distressing to him than the abandonment of his studies.

As he drove down to the docks the quiet streets reminded him that it was Sunday. It was twelve o'clock before he found the *Candia*, lying among the grim warehouses near the Tower, and he observed her

deserted appearance with some anxiety as he went on board. At first he saw no one on deck, but presently discovered a sailor leaning over the bulwarks, smoking. The Professor approached, and in his most courteous manner—his politeness was of a more formal type than is common now—asked him if the captain was on board.

'No, he ain't. What's your business?' replied the man—not a pleasant man at any time, and now not completely sober.

'I came to see—that is, to meet some friends,' explained Mr. Wintersea, 'but I fear I am rather late.'

The sailor remained leaning on the bulwarks with an eye over his shoulder. 'Yes, you ain't too soon; all the passengers went ashore yesterday.'

'Yesterday, by Jove! ah! dear me, dear

me! But perhaps you can tell me if any message was left for me by my friends?'

The sailor chuckled. 'Well, if that ain't like a landsman. Without knowing who you may be or who your friends may be, you talks about a message. Now what colours do your friends fly?'

'I beg your pardon?' asked the Professor, not comprehending.

The man turned with a look of vast amusement and scrutinised the Professor, who was beginning to be nettled.

'In your case,' he said with dignity, 'a little more of the *suaviter in modo* would not be out of place, sir.'

The Latin was resented as a personal affront. 'Look here,' growled the sailor, 'we wants none of yer damnation parly vooing on this here British ship. You ax a

straight question and I'll give you a straight answer. Isn't it bad enough, after being at sea eleven weeks, to be left here while all my mates is ashore enjoying of themselves, without being boarded by foreigners. Ay,' he added, self-pity taking the place of anger, 'eleven weeks at sea with eleven weeks' pay in hand and no chance of going ashore to spend it. I ain't a married man myself, and I ain't sorry; but that don't say as I ain't fond of ladies' society, and I've had my fair share of fun with 'em. Why, Lor' bless you, governor, when I belong to the *Evening Star*, and we was lying off Bonus Airs there was a Spanish girl——'

'Exactly, exactly,' interrupted the Professor rapidly, 'very beautiful race the Spaniards, — singularly so. Pray can you tell me whether any letter was left for

Mr. Wintersea by Mrs. Malory or the captain?'

The sailor's manner changed at once. 'Mrs. Malory, did you say? Will you be a near relation of hers?'

'A distant relation: pray, why do you ask?'

'Ah—she's dead.'

'Dead! Good God, man, are you serious? When? What?——' The Professor could not proceed.

'Ay, governor, it's a shock to you I can see, so 'twas to all aboard, but it's a fact. She died on the voyage, and we buried her at sea, sure enough.'

The Professor saw that the man was speaking the truth; he was deeply shocked; he had a peculiar horror of death. The sailor continued to relate some of the details

of the circumstances, which he hardly heard; his thoughts were far away; but suddenly he exclaimed—

'And the children, are they dead too?'

He did not know it himself, but when he asked that question there was a momentary vague hope in his heart that it might be so: it would have been the solution of a difficulty, an escape from dreaded guardianship; but if he had been conscious of the feeling he would have blushed with shame.

'Oh no, they're right enough; Captain Bunting's took 'em ashore with him; nice children they be. Why, young Dick, he was almost one of us. After we buried his mother he'd scarce speak to one of the passengers, but he come up to the fo'castle. And to see the way he looked after the kid was a sight; he always had her in tow,

and her nurse, — a stiff-backed lady, no liberties, governor, with her, no fear,—he never let her do nothing for Nan. I believe he scrubbed her decks and spread her canvas his self. I beg pardon, sir, for being short like when you come aboard ; I ain't had much time for holystoning my language, and you see you was a stranger to me, and my mates was all ashore enjoying of themselves. Well, now, I remember, the Cap'n's left a letter for you in the cabin.'

The letter was addressed to 'Mrs. Malory's friends,' and in it the Captain, after briefly mentioning her death, said that he had taken the children to the Bedford Hotel in Covent Garden, where he generally stayed himself when in London. Having read this, the Professor bestowed a fee upon his acquaintance, and departed hastily,

in a state of mind more perturbed than ever.

He was not fortunate in the circumstances of his meeting with his wards. When the door of a private room in the hotel was opened and his name announced he encountered a scene so unlike anything he had anticipated that he stood speechless with bewilderment. A tall gentleman with a noble brow and a countenance which, even in wrath, wore a long-suffering smile, was standing in the middle of the room ; opposite to him was a boy of thirteen, whose face was flushed with rage, and who was in the act of tearing up a letter, the fragments of which he threw at the benevolent gentleman's feet. On a sofa sat Captain Bunting, smiling with satisfaction, and on the Captain's knee was a pretty little girl of five. The Professor

distinctly heard the awful words, 'It's lies from beginning to end, and you're a liar and a sneak,' spoken by the boy to whom he was guardian. He was thoroughly frightened, and half unconsciously exclaimed, 'God bless my soul! Dear me! This is—this is very unusual.'

There was an awkward silence; the boy looked at the Captain; the gentleman advanced towards the Professor.

'If I am not mistaken, sir, you are this boy's guardian?' he said.

'I fear so—that is, I hope so. I——' stumbled the Professor.

'This letter, which you see in fragments, was addressed to you, sir, by me. Poor Mrs. Malory was a friend of my wife. I was in a measure entrusted with the care of the children during the voyage. I felt it my

duty to write to you with reference to the boy's character.'

'Don't listen to what he says, sir.'

'Dick,' said Captain Bunting, 'hold your noise.'

'Don't listen to him,' cried Dick, still boiling with indignation. 'The letter was all lies; he had the cheek to read it to me, and tell me to give it you. He said I didn't care when my mother—he said I insulted him and went off in bad company with the sailors, as if they weren't better than him.'

'It is all perfectly true,' said the gentleman calmly. 'The boy is almost without heart; his mother's death had no subduing influence on him—it hardened him. I should like to be allowed a few minutes' private conversation with you when you are at leisure. Now I will ask you to excuse me. You

have had an opportunity of judging for yourself what he is like.'

An uncomfortable pause followed his departure. Now that his passion had passed, the boy felt humiliated and ashamed ; it was very hard that his guardian should have met him under such circumstances ; he was silent, and looked to the Captain for help.

Captain Bunting rose with a reassuring laugh. 'You must not take too much notice of what you have just heard, sir,' said he. 'Dick and that one didn't hit it off together. There might be a bit of truth in what he said about his going too much to the fo'castle and standing drinks, but there's nothing to trouble you—Dick's right enough.'

'Of course, of course,' assented the Professor, much relieved ; 'I am delighted to

have made your acquaintance, Captain Bunting.'

Dick and the Professor then approached each other with mutual shyness.

'How d'you do, how are you?' said Mr. Wintersea. 'I'm—I'm your guardian, you know,—that is, your cousin.' He always spoke rapidly; when he was nervous he spoke more rapidly than usual.

'We hoped you'd come tremendously,' said Dick; 'it was very good of you to come to-day.'

'Oh, not at all, not at all, my dear sir, my dear boy. I ought to have met you yesterday, but the ship arrived so suddenly, you see. I really blame myself excessively, but it can't be helped now.' The poor Professor groped in his mind for a suitable way of alluding to Mrs. Malory's death, and jerked

out, 'I've heard the sad news from a sailor on board—a disappointed man apparently—dear me! so very sudden and sad, but we must be brave, my dear boy.'

'The Captain has been awfully good to us,' said Dick.

'We must thank him heartily, Thomas. Ah! yes, that is to say, Wrixon. Of course, of course. I was thinking of the editor of *Morte d'Arthur* for the moment.'

'And this is Nan, sir.'

'And are you a very good little girl?' asked the Professor.

Nan had been contemplating the strange gentleman with the beard for some time. She always associated goodness with education, and promptly replied, 'Oh yes, I can count so nicely.'

Mr. Wintersea felt immediately on his

own ground. 'Count, can you? How many can you count, my dear?'

'Almost as many as there is,' replied Nan proudly; and this so pleased the Professor that he laughed heartily, and almost forgot his recent fears.

'And now, Wrixon, about our plans. Your train for the west to-morrow leaves Paddington in the morning at 11.45, I find. What about this afternoon?' he added nervously, dreading the thought of being left alone with the boy; 'unfortunately Sunday is such a bad day for seeing London.'

'May I keep charge of them till the morning, as a favour?' asked the Captain. 'I promised Dick to take him down to the ship again; he wanted to have a last look at her.'

The Professor was relieved, and the request was so sincerely expressed that he

could have no hesitation in agreeing to it. He thanked the Captain cordially, and turned to Dick.

'You will perhaps excuse my accompanying you, Wrixon. There is an engagement I had made for five o'clock which I should be glad to keep. I should like to have seen more of the *Candia*, though there was a sailor,—a very unfavourable specimen of his class, I fear, but, poor fellow, we must make allowances—at first he was not very polite.'

'Confound the fellow!' exclaimed the Captain. 'I'll——'

'Oh pray take no notice of it!' cried the Professor anxiously. 'I assure you a mere absence of formality in manner, a seafaring bluntness, merely, quite refreshing in fact. I will call for you, Wrixon, at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, and perhaps we may see

something of London on the way to the station. Now what would you like to see particularly?'

A great field for choice was spread before this boy, for whom England was the land of all that was wonderful and pleasant, and London, though he had been somewhat disappointed with what he had already seen of it, the centre of that wonderland.

'Of course there's the inside of the Tower of London, sir, and there's St. Paul's, and Westminster Abbey, and Newgate, and the Horse Guards, and I suppose,' he added, with some condescension, 'Nan would like to see the Zoo. And would there be a chance of seeing Lord's cricket ground?'

'Lord's cricket ground? I was never there in my life. Bless me, Wrixon, all you

boys are alike: you seem to think London itself a sort of frame to Lord's cricket ground, and another place called the Ellipse —or Oval rather. No, I fear we shall not have time; besides, it is nothing but a bit of grass; there are other places of the most profound interest.' Then he suddenly remembered the existence of the strange gentleman.

'Bless my soul,' he said; 'I suppose I'll have to see this gentleman. It is very painful, but I suppose there is no help for it.'

'Don't you trouble about him, sir,' said the Captain; 'you can slip out without his seeing you. He's one of the interfering sort. People who won't mind their own business are a nuisance.'

'A very just remark, Captain Bunting, a very just remark,' said the Professor.

'You have been truly kind; we owe you our heartiest thanks. I can never thank you sufficiently for your courtesy and your care of my dear young relatives. And I have your assurance that the good gentleman was under a misapprehension?'

'Certainly, sir—bar the fo'castle. I spoke to Dick about that myself; but that was nothing, he's all right.'

'Ah yes,' answered the Professor, 'no doubt, no doubt; a farewell occasion and good wishes; valedictory rum among the mariners, and so forth — very pleasant. I am delighted to have made your acquaintance. Good-bye. Good-bye, my dear children. Nine o'clock to-morrow morning.'

The Professor departed very well pleased with the manner in which he had discharged

his duties. He wrote a letter to Mr. Wrixon detailing the circumstances of the meeting, and then dismissed the children from his mind and returned to his problem in mathematics.

CHAPTER II

UNCLES AMONG THE RUINS

Mr. Humphry Wrixon sat in his favourite corner of the old walled garden of Farinder Priory. It was December, but the day was so genial that he, a lover of warmth, had left his armchair in the library and brought out his books. Humphry was a bachelor of forty-five, plump and clean-shaven, his contented countenance so like that of the representative monk of the painter that, differently clad, he might have passed for one of the ten canons of the order of St. Augustine who had once sought seclusion in this quiet corner

of the world. The warm wall behind him was bright with blossoms of yellow jasmine; a robin sang in an apple-tree; pleasant country sounds came from the distance,—the lowing of cattle, the talk of the rookery, the hum of the threshing-machine, suddenly falling half an octave in tone as a new sheaf went between the rollers. On his knee was a copy of *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, in his mouth an enormous pipe.

He had excited some curiosity in the neighbourhood when he had joined his brother at Farinder; but, as there was no lady in the establishment, little more was known about him now than when he first came. Even his brother had been surprised at his choice, and had received no other explanation for it than that the Priory contained an excellent cellar in which he

could keep his wine, and a room which could be converted into a good library for his books. His brother was fifteen years his senior; he had retired early from the navy, and, after wandering about for a few years an aimless widower, had bought the ruined Priory, which was a fragment of family property. He was a man who had been proposed by nature as an artist, and disposed by a stern parent in the navy. The old buildings were to him a sacred charge; it was his daily task to prevent their falling into further ruin. He was a sculptor of some ability, and in one of the outbuildings, which he had converted into a workshop, he did loving daily work in clay and stone.

Nothing disturbed Humphry, not even the advent of the young people, which had fluttered his brother with pleasant excite-

ment. He had found their presence agreeable, his habits were in no way disturbed by them, and they had brought with them a new brightness to the daily life. Dick pleased him; he looked upon him critically as a probable inheritor of his wine and his books, the possessions he valued most, and he was hopeful that with judicious training he might become worthy of the double responsibility,

After finishing his pipe, Humphry remembered that Squire Longfield, the only neighbour who was a regular visitor at the Priory, was coming with his boy to dine that night, and that a few words with the cook would be necessary. He strolled out of the garden into the garth, passing through a gateway, on each side of which was a shield: one charged with the five Holy Wounds, the

other with a chevron between three bugle-horns. The garth had been used as a farm-yard for generations, and the outbuildings and even the chapel had, after the dissolution of the monastery, been converted into farm buildings. A look of special satisfaction was on his face as he passed Ovens, Nan's maid; for he remembered that the month's notice to leave which she had given immediately on arrival expired in a few days. Ovens, on being asked why she wished to leave, had said that she liked life too much to stay in such a place. With Voweraker junior, son of the old out-door servant, he exchanged friendly greeting. Voweraker junior, holding a ladder against the chapel wall, was waiting for Mr. Wrixon, who was about to ascend to remove some encroaching ivy from the tracery of a window. Voweraker senior had

gone to Wayland to buy a cow for Nan's particular benefit.

He found his brother within the chapel wistfully contemplating some uncarved blocks of stone at the intersection of four of the arch mouldings in the nave. These, and some unfinished column capitals in the chancel, had been left unexecuted at the dissolution. Humphry knew that it was the old man's highest ambition to complete these himself, and that his veneration for the old work was such that he hesitated to touch them.

'Well, John,' he said, 'you are thinking of making a beginning perhaps?'

Humphry spoke very slowly, lingering on every word as though he loved it, drawling at such times as he was serious. He had also a difficulty with his letter '*r*,' and

was sometimes obliged to make his '*w*' do double service.

'It would be sacrilege, Humphry,' replied Mr. Wrixon. 'It would be like an inferior man undertaking to complete a book which another had left unfinished when he died.'

'But these two look so lonely by themselves. When I see them I feel inclined to finish the others myself for the sake of giving them some society. They have been waiting three hundred years for the birth of their friends. And it is not like completing an unfinished book; each of these heads is complete in itself.'

'I don't agree with you, Humphry. The two already finished show signs of the same hand. It is my belief that the sculptor had an idea which he meant to carry out through the series. Poor fellow! I expect he died,

and his companions would allow no one else to continue his work.'

'My dear brother,' Humphry protested, 'I am perfectly convinced you are mistaken. You know the monastic life had sunk low before the dissolution, and it is my belief that these heads are uncarved because the monks were too lazy to do the work,—they were too fat to go up ladders.'

'I wish you would be serious sometimes, Humphry. Well, perhaps some day I may attempt the work. I wonder if there is any chance of Dick taking to sculpture; he likes coming to the workshop.'

'That's to avoid lessons.'

'Well, perhaps so, but if he should take up sculpture some day as his profession it would be a great delight to me. We shall have to think seriously about his education,

Humphry; it has been greatly neglected. I wanted him to do a little Latin this morning, but he says it is the holidays, and Tom Longfield has come home. They have gone off together somewhere.'

'We shall have to send the fellow to school.'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Wrixon, with reluctance, 'after a year, I think. We might coach him a little at home first.'

Humphry entered the house through a door at the end of the chapel. He went to his library, and, after replacing *The Golden Ass* on the shelf, opened a cupboard and took out a decanter containing some very excellent bitter sherry, and a plate of biscuits. Then he rang the bell and had an audience with the cook. This was a daily occurrence, —the sole part which he took in the manage-

ment of the household,—but to-day he had some special instructions to give on account of the expectation of visitors. He informed Mrs. Collop that a barrel of oysters would be sent up during the afternoon by the carrier, and expounded to her some sound doctrine on her duty towards her snipe. The income of the brothers was moderate, but their expenses were few, and Humphry regarded the possession of a good cook as a necessity. He had himself gone to London some years before to secure one, and had brought Mrs. Collop back with him. Having concluded this, the only business of his day, and finished his abstemious lunch, he again went out into the sunshine. This time he strolled down the avenue towards the village.

The Priory was well placed on the hill to

catch the best of the sunshine. It looked down on the roofs of the village, and the broad grass-grown street. To the north the woodland sloped to the moor, and westward there was a peep of the channel.

It was pleasant in the fields this morning: the sunshine fell cheerfully on farm and cottage; on thatched roofs the bright green moss had crimson patches; the leafless woods wore their delicate winter hues of madder and dusky green; the bare hedges were bright with scarlet berries; and in the far distance the green country-side passed into misty blue against the pale blue sky. On the grass beside the pathway the moles had upturned fresh mounds of red earth; plovers were wheeling, black to white, against a cloud; a ruffle of wind came from the south.

He stopped to talk with wayfarers in the

road, or the village children coming from school. He had a fraternal word for every one: he did not think highly of human nature, but he loved it none the less on that account. He paused to watch the rooks. He and the Priory rooks understood each other; his presence never disturbed them, they regarded him as one of themselves; and them he regarded as friends, as monks, apart from the world, untouched by the changes of time, yet understanding man, and dwelling near the homes of the trustworthy; as philosophers, neither hurrying nor exulting, but leading godly lives of daily content.

'Life is very pleasant,' he thought, 'very pleasant. For those who are content to take what it gives, it gives so much; and those who are always asking something which it cannot give deserve to be unhappy, and do

not understand what they want.' He remembered a disappointment of the past, a dream, an ideal which he had once cherished. This thought made him grave for a few moments; then the smile of satisfaction returned to his face. 'Yes,' he mused, 'life is very good, if you don't take it seriously.'

CHAPTER III

VOWERAKER DROPS A SPARK

THAT evening after dinner a merry party gathered round the deep fireplace in the refectory at the Priory. The sound of such laughter had not been heard since the time of the canons; for the quiet farm folk who had afterwards occupied the building were not given to mirth. The presence of youth radiated; the great fire of peat and logs looked pleasanter now that there were young eyes to read the pictures in it; the basset hound, who had usually slept at this hour on former evenings, lay on the rug with open, contented eyes.

The conversation was of stag-hunting, and other subjects dear to boys and pleasant to their elders. Tom wanted little encouragement to talk: he produced fragments of schoolboy lore, which were marvellous to Dick; he knew all the cricket averages of the best players for the last three years; he dimly hinted that he himself was writing the life of Jupp, the Surrey professional, though it afterwards transpired that that work had not progressed beyond the first sentence: 'Henry Jupp first saw the light at Clapham, in the county of Surrey.'

Although it was winter, Tom had a purpose in introducing the theme of cricket. A new ground was being made for the village on one of his father's fields, which had one fault from a player's point of view, though this fault was one of its charms to an un-

critical spectator: it was surrounded by fine old trees. Tom wished to see some of these trees removed. He had ventured the request once without success, but he had then been alone with his father. Now he craftily calculated that his good humour and the presence of others might induce him to be reasonable.

'I suppose you've seen the new field?' he asked Dick, with an air of indifference.

'Yes, where they are stripping the turf off,' replied Dick.

'There won't be a better village ground in the county. It has only one disadvantage, the light is bad—rather too many trees. I say, governor, do you mind giving Mr. Banks permission to have down two or three of the elms at the top and bottom of the field? They'll interfere with the light for a

catch in the country. I know they're good trees, but we have any amount of others. Just four of the elms, sir?'

'No, I'm damned if I will,' said the Squire, suddenly growing angry. 'Why, boy, you'd turn the game into a piece of machinery. When I was a lad we went to the wicket like men, begad, and took our chance of a crack on the legs. Now you muffle your shins in padding and your hands in india-rubber. Psh, and you must have screens behind the wicket; and, because you're such confounded young butter-fingers, you say you can't see the ball, and want to cut down my trees. Upon my soul, it's too bad. I wish I'd never allowed the new ground to be made on my land, begad.'

Tom took refuge behind the authority of the Church. 'Oh, just as you like, sir,' he

replied, in an aggrieved tone, 'but I'm not the only one who thinks so. Mr. Middleton said it would be a thousand pities to see a first-class ground spoilt for the sake of a few trees.'

'Well, Middleton ought to know better,' thundered the Squire—'a clergyman of the Church of England, and a Conservative. Does he want to see the country stripped bare? A parson, Wrixon, would you believe it? If I'd known he had ideas of that sort he wouldn't have had the living, begad. We'll have you asking us to take down the fences next, because it's easier to cross country without 'em.'

'Well, I shan't be at home much, so it won't make much difference to me,' Tom remarked, rather defiantly.

'What should you say about it, Wrixon,

if the trees were yours?' asked the Squire, cooling down.

'I should keep the trees,' replied Mr. Wrixon, laughing.

'Of course you would. No, Tom—look here, I'll double my subscription to the club, but the trees won't come down; that's settled.'

Tom saw that further argument was useless, and said no more.

Mr. Wrixon sent for Nan, who had disappeared just before the guests arrived. A little frown of perplexity gathered on his brow as he glanced from Mr. Longfield's cigar to Humphry's pipe. The long absence of ladies' society had made them careless about many of their habits at the Priory, but he began to be thoughtful on Nan's account; her surroundings should be as

refined, he argued, as if she had a mother.

'Don't you think, Humphry,' he suggested, 'that the smoke might make the child cough? Eh, excuse me, Longfield, I forgot you were smoking too,—she'll be off to bed, you know, in a few minutes.'

'Oh, she doesn't mind smoking a bit, sir,' said Dick; 'she got accustomed to it at sea.'

Nan came into the room with a plate in her hand and tears in her eyes. On the plate were five fox-terrier puppy dogs' tails, arranged in a row.

'My dear child, what have you got there?' asked Mr. Wrixon.

Humphry laid down his pipe and regarded her and her plate with great interest. The boys exchanged comical glances; they had themselves assisted at the amputation of the tails.

'Cruel, naughty boys!' said Nan, 'you let them do it. They've cut off the poor, poor little puppies' tails.'

Mr. Wrixon took her on his knee and tried to comfort her.

'They won't never wag again,' she said dolefully.

'But you know, my dear,' said Mr. Wrixon, 'all little puppy dogs of this sort have their tails cut off.'

This information brought small comfort.

'But,' she insisted, 'their eyes opened yesterday when they was ten days old, and if their tails *had* to be cut off, why wasn't they done before they opened their eyes, and then they'd never have known they ever had any tails, and wouldn't have minded so much?'

'You are a very wise little girl,' said Humphry gravely, amid the laughter of the

others; 'and when Gin has any more pups we'll not wait so long, or not cut them off at all.'

'Fox-terriers, Humphry, fox-terriers,' remonstrated Mr. Longfield.

'Why should they be cut off at all?' asked Nan.

'I don't think they ought to be cut off, Nan,' replied her champion; 'they might be very useful to them sometime or other. Once upon a time'—the magic words banished her sorrow—'once upon a time there was a poor sailor who was wrecked at sea, and left out alone in a boat with his dog, which he had saved. They had nothing to eat for several days, and the man was almost starving, and so was the dog. He would not kill the dog and eat him, because he loved him, so what do you think he did?'

'Killed himself, and gave himself to the poor starving dog,' said Nan, much interested.

'No, he did something better; he cut off the dog's tail, and cooked it, and ate it, and gave the dog the bone.'

Humphry and Nan remained solemn, unmoved by the laughter of the others.

'Did they get safely to their home?' she asked.

'Yes, my dear; a good ship picked them up the next morning and brought them safe to land, and the poor dog wanted to wag his tail for joy, and had not got one to wag.'

Nan went off to bed happy, leaving her plate of tails behind her. Humphry took it up and addressed the boys in a portentous tone.

'These puppy dogs' tails are an illustration

of the rights of the masses, which they are born with. In former times they lost their rights, as the puppies often lose their tails, before their eyes were opened: now their eyes are opened, and they see them being taken way. Whether rights are good for the people, or tails for fox-terriers, is another matter. In both cases their masters think they look better without them.'

'Really, Humphry, is it desirable to put such notions into the boys' heads?' said his brother, rather testily; 'they may think you are in earnest.'

'Well,' Humphry yielded, 'leave the masses and apply the illustration to the case of woman.'

'Oh,' cried the Squire, losing all patience, 'what the devil do you want us to believe? Do you want me to think that

a fox-terrier ought to have a long tail, and every ignorant blackguard in the country have the same rights as his betters? And you'd give every may-cow of a woman a vote, and make 'em doctors and lawyers, begad.'

'On the contrary,' replied Humphry. 'Personally, though I think it is rather unjust, I prefer to see a fox-terrier without a tail, and a woman without her rights.'

'Well, why did you say the opposite?' said the Squire, immediately mollified. 'What a humbug you are, Humphry. One never knows whether you are in earnest or not. This uncle of yours is an old humbug, Dick, and you must be careful to take what he says with a grain of salt. D'ye hear — *multis granis* — that's good Latin, ain't it, Wrixon?' The Squire laughed

heartily, and the boys joined him. Mr. Wrixon produced a backgammon board.

'What do you say to our game, Longfield?' he asked; 'I want my revenge. By the way, next time you're passing in daylight I wish you'd have a look at a little cow I bought to-day for the young lady's special benefit. You boys can be off for a bit, if you like.'

They were ready enough to take advantage of the permission. Tom had a visit to the inn and the introduction of his new friend to some village institutions in view.

'I say,' said he, when they were outside, 'you don't suppose old Humphry was in earnest, do you? He can't be a Radical? I believe he was drawing my parent. You're a Conservative, of course? I suppose you're going into the army?'

'If they'll let me,' replied Dick. 'I don't know whether I can afford it. I mean to, if I can.'

'Oh, you must work it. I am. After next term I'm going to read for a bit with a coach, and then I'm going to Sandhurst. I say, Malory, I do hope there'll be a jolly good war soon after I get in. I wonder who it's likely to be with—the Germans, I suppose.'

'It's a pity they've beaten the French,' said Dick, meditatively. 'I should like to have begun on the French, and I don't like the idea of any one but us licking the French. I'd like to fight the French because they are gentlemen. My governor said the Germans were not.'

'It is a pity,' Tom assented sadly; 'and besides, there won't be so much credit in

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licking the French now that the Germans have done it.'

'But fighting isn't as good as it used to be,' Dick continued. 'What a lark it must have been for a knight with a few followers to have taken a castle himself.'

'Oh, but there's plenty of good fighting left,' Tom argued. 'Look at Balaklava. I mean to get into a cavalry regiment if I can.'

'And if I can't afford to go in as an officer, I suppose I shall have to enlist,' said Dick, 'and work up. I don't see why a gentleman shouldn't enlist.'

The word gentleman was still full of significance for him: it summed up the religion of his father. Goethe remarked that the beautiful was greater than the good, forasmuch as the beautiful included the good: the late Captain Malory held that

good breeding was greater than morality, since it included morality, or, at least, so much as was necessary. Honour was to him the thing of paramount importance; it even justified the duel under certain circumstances, and he had himself fought one. He had instilled some of his ideas on the subject into his son.

'I knew two fellows who were gentlemen who enlisted,' Tom said. 'If it comes to that, you enlist in my regiment, and I'll do all I can to shove you on, old chap, but I hope you'll work it without.'

As they came to the village the boys fell into the attitude towards each other of host and guest. Tom made a suitable impression on his companion. At the inn he called the landlord's daughter by her christian name, complimented her upon her personal

appearance, and as he entered the inn room, where the village company was assembled, he actually lighted a cigar. The presence of the boys produced a mental awakening among the company; the pauses in the talk were fewer; they made no more personal remarks about cows.

Souls these simple folks no doubt possessed, but they were hidden away and lost in their bodies. Or, if the body be the clothing of the soul, in their case it did not seem as if they had been measured; there was a want of proportion in the amount of body and the amount of soul, which resembled the condition of an urchin in his father's breeches. They were as so many flints with hidden lights, but not able to strike them for each other. Tom was as the necessary steel, and won sparks from them:

he had a charm to rouse them and make them laugh ; he seemed to know what to say to each, and was very popular among them.

The old inn room, with settle and chimney seats ; the low ceiling, from the great beam of which depended sides of bacon dangerously hanging over the heads of subjacent rustics ; the rustics themselves with ruddy faces, slowly responsive and kindly—some of them bearing marks of acquaintance with half a century's beer and hard weather, comparable to the coloured clay pipe on which no thought has been bestowed, just as other faces delicately tinted with port wine are suggestive of the well-toned meerschaum—all made a pleasant scene, picturesque in its way, and novel to Dick.

Tom introduced him, — his friend Mr.

Malory who had come to live in this country.

Dick rose to the occasion; he said he was very glad to make their acquaintance, and hoped they would do him the honour of allowing him to order drinks for them all. This produced a very favourable impression, and met with Tom's hearty approval. The landlord took the order with a beaming face, and chairs were brought for the boys.

'You'll be down here now for a bit, maybe, Master Tom?' inquired a farmer.

'Well,' said Tom, 'yes, a month or so, and then I shall have to prepare for the army.'

'Ah, well now, well, to be sure,' said the landlord; 'so you won't stay with us, you're for the army? well now.'

'You see,' explained Tom, regarding his cigar ash critically, 'the country must have

defenders, and although it's pleasant enough here in the old place, a man must not shirk his duty.'

This remark was received with a murmur of approbation.

'And duty's duty,' remarked the butcher, 'and foreigners wants teaching their place.'

'Ah,' observed an old herdsman, 'they're funny chaps, they foreigners — fights wi' knives, they say. I wouldn't like to live along with 'em from what I do hear. I don't know the sensation of 'em myself, but it's what I do hear, gentlemen.'

'Hullo!' cried Dick, 'if that isn't old Voweraker, and I believe he's drunk.'

Voweraker had been sleeping unobserved in a corner, and was now aroused amid general laughter. He was drunk for the first time since he had been in Mr. Wrixon's

employment. It was a great day in his life, a cow had been bought. Things had gone along so uneventfully at the Priory until now, his duties were of so unimposing a kind, that the thought of the responsibility attending the care of a cow fascinated him: he felt a new dignity. He had himself been entrusted with the purchase, and the occasion had been too great for considerations of prudence.

'Voweraker,' said Dick, 'you are drunk.'

'It's like this here, Mr. Dick, and gen'lemen all,' said Voweraker, staggering to his feet. 'Who says I'm drunk says wrong. Maybe I've overstepped the bounds o' prudence. But this little cow, oh dear, oh dear. Hast thee ever heard I sing, Master Dick?'

'Don't make a fool o' theeself, John,' said a neighbour; 'sit down and keep quiet,

the beer's hurt thee back, thee casn't stand straight.'

'Beer!' said Voweraker indignantly, 'don't 'ee talk to I o' beer, give me a nice drop o' zider, *I* say, better than all the beer, *I* say. And that little cow, God bless her—a better milker, gen'lemen, and Mr. Dick, where'll you find? I ask, meanin' no offence.'

'Some o' Squire's cows have a great name,' suggested one of the company.

'Squire Longfield's a gen'leman,' replied Voweraker, 'so he be, and his cows is good cows, as they am. Squire Longfield's a gen'leman, and he 'on't deny it, and young Mr. Tom settin there as happy as a king, he 'on't deny it. Eh, but he's a fine lad, he be. What a leg 'er got on 'er, han't 'er?'

In spite of his use of the feminine pronoun it was understood that he had called upon

the company to admire Tom's leg, not the cow's, and Tom had to submit to general scrutiny, feeling rather uncomfortable.

'It's a fine family, friends,' continued Voweraker, 'young Tom's a fine lad, and Miss Margaret, her's a straightbacked likely maid. Likely thee'll go coortin' there some day, Mas'r Dick?'

This speech was received with great laughter; but Voweraker was becoming unbearable. Dick blushed scarlet.

'Shut up, you old donkey,' he said, angrily, 'you're getting cheeky. If you say any more we'll put you under the pump. I say, Tom, oughtn't we to be going?'

More laughter followed at Voweraker's expense; he was crestfallen; and, when the boys left, he was weeping copiously and making incoherent references to the cow.

Tom was in great spirits as they walked home. He was pleased with the impression he felt he had produced on Dick as showman, and he was satisfied with the way in which his friend had conducted himself. They laughed at the villagers and made plans for the next day; they were already fast friends.

'I shall tell Peggy what Voweraker said about you going courting her,' said Tom.

'Oh, don't,' Dick interrupted quickly; 'no lady would like to think her name had been made free with among a lot of yokels at an inn.'

'Oh, it's nothing,' Tom assured him. 'Fancy Peggy minding!'

'I should be much obliged if you wouldn't,' said Dick.

'Oh, well, if you make a point of it I won't.'

He became suddenly preoccupied, but just as they were approaching the Priory gates he addressed Dick confidentially: 'I say, old fellow, did you happen to notice the girl I was with this afternoon. The girl in furs, you know, who's staying with us?'

'Rather,' Dick replied.

'Isn't she ripping?'

'Ripping,' Dick assented; but at the same time he made a note that she was not to be compared with Tom's sister Margaret. Voweraker's random remark had set him thinking.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST LOVE

THE coming of his first English spring was a great event to Dick, both for its own sake, and because with it came his first love.

Love is generally in possession of the heart for some little time before he is discovered. He is a stowaway on the ship, who does not declare his presence until there is no chance of putting him ashore; he comes into the heart in some other guise, as the Greeks came into Troy; and, when nothing is suspected, it is suddenly found that the citadel is taken.

Voweraker's words had made Dick aware that he had fallen in love with Tom's sister. After this life began to look different; there was something new and delightful and painful in it. At his studies he was not so attentive as usual—a sure sign of a disturbed heart or stomach. His uncles noticed it, and blamed the wrong organ.

Dick was perplexed as to how to act; whether to confide in Tom, whose return to school had been delayed by a humiliating attack of measles, or boldly to see the lady herself. At one time he considered the desirability of an interview with the Squire before making any advances to his daughter; he had heard that this was considered an honourable course, but it did not commend itself to him, and he remembered no precedent for it in the loves of the days of

chivalry. At last he decided upon a letter to Margaret. The composition of it cost him some anxiety, and he passed the interval of a couple of days between its despatch and the receipt of the reply in a state of great unrest.

On the second day Tom appeared, and, with a look of gravity—a certain superiority, as became the lady's relative—handed him in silence a note written in a handwriting in which only the eye of love could have discerned grace. Dick put it in his pocket nervously; he could not read it before Tom, but Tom seemed to understand, and, with a preoccupied air, begged Dick not to think of him—he had several things on his own mind, and would take a short walk and return in half an hour. Dick climbed the church-tower as a place of seclusion to devour

his letter. It contained the following matter :—

My dear Dick—I was so surprised to get your note. I shall keep the flowers till I die. For goodness' sake don't say a word to the governor or any one but Tom. Tom knows all about it. He will understand. Tom loves too. Je vous aime.—In haste, yours truly,

Margaret Selwyn Longfield.

It was a moment of intoxication. He descended the tower rapidly. The sight of Humphry sent him back again. Then he began to surround his new possessions with imaginary insecurity. What if she should change her mind? He read the letter over again.

'My dear Dick' and 'yours truly' read rather coldly, but then, he argued, that was only becoming maidenly reserve. His critical sense received a momentary shock at her allusion to 'the governor,' but the insight of

love gave him power of interpretation. After all, it was a noble phrase—'the governor.' It showed that the daughter really regarded the father in the light of a superior being, in whose governance her life was placed. She would keep the flowers till she died: gentle being! The allusion to her mortality almost brought tears to his eyes. And then in the French phrase there was something altogether subtle and charming. She could not bring herself to write the words in common English; she spoke them in a foreign tongue. Yes, the letter was perfect as the writer.

At the end of half an hour Tom returned, his head bent, his bright smile gone.

'I know all about this affair between you and Peggy,' he said, as they walked down the avenue together. 'Well, you have my

consent, old boy. It's not every one finds matters run as smoothly as you have.'

This Dick admitted.

'I suppose,' continued Tom, 'you're too full of your own affairs to listen to those of any one else. Old Pegtops isn't a bad sort of girl, but what a fellow can see in her to fall in love with beats me.'

'She's ——' Dick could find no adequate words of praise. 'I wish you would not call her "Pegtops,"' he protested.

'There are troubles,' Tom continued, unmoved, 'which you happily know nothing of.' He sighed profoundly. 'Dick, I'm in love, and I'm miserable. I feel my life is wrecked. I can't eat, and I can't read, and I'm certain I shall get spun for Sandhurst. I believe she cares more for another man.'

'I say, that's serious. Where does she live, and who is she?'

'Well, I don't mind telling you, Dick; it's Miss Medley; you saw her at Christmas. She wore furs, you remember?'

'But she's grown up,' said Dick.

'She's two years and ten months older than me, and I should like to know what difference that makes, and I'm told I look old for my age. She certainly gave me every encouragement at Christmas. She—well, I'm not at liberty to tell you what passed. I took her in to supper—there wasn't a girl there got better looked after at supper—and by Jove, Dick, didn't she look lovely?'

'Lovely,' assented Dick. 'I saw you dancing together, and I wished I could dance like you. And now you think she cares for another fellow?'

'I have grave suspicions,' said Tom, 'and I know some one else is after her. Oh, it is unbearable! We exchanged letters, Dick. I have a letter from her in my pocket now. It shakes one's faith in the whole sex. I can't bear this suspense. I want action of some kind. I should like at this moment to be in a football scrimmage.'

'No,' Dick corrected him, 'a cavalry charge would be the thing, a charge like the Light Brigade.'

'Yes, you're quite right, a cavalry charge *is* the thing. Of course, I don't despair.'

'Who's the other chap?'

Tom looked terrible. 'Who do you think? That horrid old General Adams, the governor's friend, an old, selfish bachelor, a stiff-kneed, wrinkled, pot-bellied old beast. It makes me sick to think of it.

The governor said at breakfast he shouldn't wonder if Adams settled down after all, and mentioned his admiration for Kitty, and said what a good thing it would be for her, as she has no coin. "Adams is hit at last," said he, "and Kitty'd make him a sweet little wife. I'm half in love with her myself." I left the table, Dick, it was unbearable.'

'It was the only thing to do,' Dick replied, sympathetically.

'I'd call him out,' continued Tom, 'only people don't fight duels now, and besides, the old wineskin wouldn't fight. He'd treat me as if I were a boy; he'd get the governor on his side. No, it won't do at all. I shall have to write to the dear girl, she's gone back to town, you know, and I'm a wretched hand at composition. Perhaps you can give me a help. I thought something in poetry

might tell—girls all like poetry—something about January and May, Dick. You'll think it over, won't you, like a good chap. I'll come round to-night, and we'll write it. By the way, old Pegs said if you'd care to see her, she'll be at home by herself to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock.'

'I must really beg of you, Tom, to call your sister by her proper name. What better name do you want than Margaret? Pegs! I'll take it as a favour, Tom.'

'Oh! all right,' said Tom, departing, 'but she answers to that name.'

Next day Dick was ushered into the presence of the young lady by her brother. He felt rather awkward, and could not find any words appropriate; the mood in which he had written his letter had deserted him. Margaret was the first to speak.

'It's not quite so cold to-day,' she remarked.

'No, indeed,' said Dick, 'it's beautiful weather.'

'And what a jolly morning it was. I rode past the Priory.'

'If you two are going to talk about the weather all the afternoon, I'll leave you alone,' said Tom. 'What's the use of humbugging? Give her a kiss, Dick, like a man.'

Dick blushed. A kiss was a sacred thing, belonging to a much later date in courtship than this, to his thinking; but Margaret was not disturbed.

'Mr. Malory knows how to behave as a gentleman,' she said. 'You're a cheeky boy, Tom, and we don't want you here. Do we?' she appealed to Dick.

Tom chuckled. '"Mr. Malory,"' he repeated, 'that's pretty good. Dick, you take my advice, and have a kiss. She likes kissing. I could tell you a thing or two.'

A few days afterwards Tom went back to school. He had received no answer to his letter to Miss Medley, but he said that he was hopeful, and that he did not intend to allow his spirit to be crushed, whatever happened; he would not allow any woman to destroy his career; he intended to work hard.

The south-west wind blew up from the sea, and brought days of gentle rain; the feeling of the spring-time was in the air, new scents came from the ground, the snowdrops had come and gone, and the trees were still bare, but the golden flowers of the celandine were bright on grassy banks, and a few early primroses clustered in the shelter of the

hedges and tree-trunks. Every new flower was a delight to Dick, who saw the wonder of spring now for the first time. It was Margaret who told him the names of the flowers and the birds. She did not feel the same interest in watching the change, but it was a new pleasure to her to be able to give information which could be of interest: Tom had never shown any interest in anything she had ever said. She was given considerable freedom, and came in and went out much as she pleased, the only enemy she had to fear being her governess; but Miss Templet was a poet, and loved solitude and the opportunity of composing lines for a newspaper in Glamorganshire, to which county she belonged.

Margaret came up constantly to the Priory, ostensibly to see Nan. Her visits

brought a further cheerfulness to the old place. She would talk to Mrs. Collop in the most friendly way, and compliment her on her young ducks and chickens; she would make jokes to old Voweraker, and more than once Dick, with mingled feelings, saw her milk the cow. She paid constant visits to Mr. Wrixon's workshop. He was well pleased to see his little idol, Nan, taken notice of. Margaret and he became great friends, and there was always a good deal of laughing in the workshop when she came in. Dick's love made him so serious just now that she probably found it a relief to be merry with the old man or to milk the cow. With Humphry she was more on her guard, they regarded each other with a certain coyness and a suspicion that each was quietly amused with something in the other.

She and Dick rode together sometimes, for Tom had made him promise to use his horse while he was away. On one of their rides he ventured, with some hesitation, on a matter which was troubling him, born of Tom's hasty words.

'You know, Margaret,' he said, 'you are my first love. Am I yours? Did you ever love before? Don't be offended at my asking, but you know I could not bear the thought of your caring for any one else.'

'Why do you ask? I never asked you any questions like that,' she replied, provokingly.

'I think I have a right to know,' said Dick.

'Then you won't know,' she answered, 'and if you are going to ask rude questions, I shall not ride any farther with you.'

Then there was silence and inward misgivings for about the space of ten minutes, during which they galloped along the turf; but Margaret's horse got on ahead.

'You see, Dick, I have to wait for you,' she said, pulling up. 'You can't do everything you like with me. Now, don't be cross and I'll tell you. No, I never cared for any one before really—perhaps I may have fancied I did a little, but not really, you know.'

And with this he had to be satisfied. It is the explanation which is so often given, and has always to be accepted, between lovers. The last love, it seems, is always the real one; in all the previous ones we had deceived ourselves.

'Margaret,' he asked, 'what can I do to prove my love to you? I can only say how

I love you, but I cannot do anything noble or great to show you.'

'I don't want you to do anything, Dick.'

Dick was disappointed. 'Can't you think of anything you would like me to achieve for you?'

'Well, of course some day you will go into the army and be a hero.'

'I mean to try, but now—is there anything you would wish me to do for you now?'

'There's one thing I want, Dick. I've been wanting it ever so long for my collection,—a nettle-creeper's egg.'

She said this perfectly seriously, and Dick felt like Naaman when he was told to wash in Jordan. It was too trivial—a nettle-creeper's egg in exchange for her love. But, nevertheless, he set to work to find one, and he also thought of another gift, better than

this, which should be a pledge between them: he was skilful with his hands, and had learned from one of the sailors on board ship to hammer silver rings from florins and shillings, and he now set to work with great zeal and all the cunning he possessed to fashion one. It was not a bad bit of work, and, with the help of one of Mr. Wrixon's tools, he traced a creditable heart on its surface. The discovery of a nettle-creeper's egg was attended with greater difficulties, as he did not know in the least what a nettle-creeper was like; but this also was at last to yield to the power of love, and both gifts were presented humbly to the lady.

The days sped pleasantly and the course of love ran smoothly until the end of the summer, when Dick's felicity received a

sudden disturbance. One morning, with scarcely any preliminary warning in the way of coldness of demeanour from Margaret, he received the following note :—

DEAR MR. MALORY—Miss Templet and my conscience tell me that we have done wrong in meeting as often as we have. She thinks my father would not approve of it, and that 'men were deceivers ever.' I'm afraid we must part. We must forget the past. I return the ring. I shall always esteem you.—Yours sincerely,

MARGARET SELWYN LONGFIELD.

Tom returned a few days afterwards. His own love affair had not progressed, but the effects of his failure were not serious. Dick put a question about it when they met, and his brow darkened.

'Never mention her name again,' he said; 'she is henceforth dead to me.'

'Women are all weather-cocks,' said Dick, bitterly.

'Yes, weather-cocks ought to be called weather-hens,' replied Tom. 'I want you to drive down to-morrow with me to Porlock, and we'll have a sail. Come, don't bother about women!'

CHAPTER V

MODELLING IN THE ROUND

Dick was a hero-worshipper, but he did not always choose his heroes wisely. Schoolboys are apt to despise respectable people more heartily than they deserve, and to exalt the lawless overmuch. At school, Caruthers, his leader, a boy who had chosen him among the juniors for the special honour of his friendship, had committed most of the sins of which boys are proud, but he was good-looking and clever, and had the second best average in the eleven. Dick loved him with all his heart; he delighted in sharing his

adventures and doing him service when he should have been working. His hero took the place, and more than the place, of Margaret Longfield in his affection. She was a deity growing with time more and more shadowy, as indeed is the habit of deities.

But at the end of his third term his idol was shattered and his school days came to an end. Caruthers sent him through a window to the study of one of the masters, to get a portfolio of sketches which, he said, belonged to him, and had been unjustly confiscated. Dick was caught; and the portfolio contained not sketches but examination papers. It was a shameful action. Dick was paralysed when he knew the truth, but he refused to give the name of his chief. He took the consequent castigation, inflicted in the sight of the whole school, like a man,

believing firmly that Caruthers would come forward and clear him; but his hero was of base clay and made no sign. After it was over he flung an affectionate arm round Dick's neck and called him a brick. He showed him that if he, a boy in the upper school, were convicted of the crime, he would be expelled; that his father would disown him, and he would be ruined; whereas for a junior the whole thing was different, and would soon be forgotten. Dick suffered far less during the flogging than when he saw his hero in his true light: he despised him and he was indignant; but even then his love for his leader, his remembrance of old favours, prevailed, and he was true to him.

That night, at an hour when the boys were supposed to be in bed, he entertained

his dormitory at a farewell supper. Kidneys and sausages were cooked; bottled beer and cider, plates of fruit, cake, a box of cigarettes, and other delicacies were on the table; the neck of a bottle of champagne protruded from a jug on a washhand-stand, where it had been placed to keep cool. He had been supplied that morning with funds for his travelling, and the payment of some small bills, and had, after allowing enough for a third-class ticket home, spent the remnant on his feast.

'This is one of the few advantages of a private school,' remarked Theobald minor. 'They couldn't do this at a public school. I have a brother at Rugby; they stick a sixth-form boy into every dormitory.'

'This is the first supper I remember at the end of a term,' said Crabb, 'there's no

coin left. I mean to have one, beginning of next term, and I invite you all.'

Dick looked mysterious. 'I suppose you fellows think I really went after the examination papers,' said he. 'Well, I didn't.'

No one believed him, but he was their host, and they were discreetly silent. He had an important announcement to make, but he reserved it until the uncorking of the champagne. It was a solemn gathering; prudence forbade sounds of revelry. Micklejohn, a small boy, delicately thoughtful for Dick's tenderness after castigation, brought a pillow from a bed and placed it beneath him on the hard chair.

Dick acknowledged the courtesy, but said he did not so much object to the pain as its locality. It was a distinct indignity to inflict punishment there. The Spartans boasted

that they never received wounds in the back; but to themselves no alternative was given: the marks implied flight or submission. Jones secundus comforted him by the reminder that they were out of sight.

As the meal progressed they became more hilarious. After the champagne was opened—it had to be divided amongst eight boys—Dick made his speech. He repeated his statement that he was innocent; he said that he had been that afternoon to the headmaster and told him so, and had not been believed. He had therefore decided to leave the school at daybreak next morning. He would not call it running away. He would leave a place where the word of a gentleman was not taken.

The news caused much excitement; he became exalted in their eyes. Little Eustace,

the youngest boy in the dormitory, shed tears.

'It's rather too much to be treated as a liar,' said Dick.

'Well, after all, I suppose we *are* liars,' said Theobald minor, who was matter-of-fact. 'No mistake we *do* tell stickers.'

'Not "on your honour,"' said Dick. 'Stuffing a fellow's one thing, but if you give your honour the thing's different.'

The distinction was admitted, and Dick's health was drunk. After this 'He's a jolly good fellow' was sung up the chimney, and without being found out they went to sleep in an atmosphere of sausages and tobacco smoke. Next morning before breakfast Dick was gone.

The reports of his progress, which Mr. Wrixon had received, had been so unsatis-

factory that he was not sorry to have the boy under his eye again. He did not send him to another school, but kept him at home, where he soon fell back into the old routine of study which had been instituted when he first came to the Priory. This subsequently included a regular attendance in Mr. Wrixon's workshop. Here he made good advancement, and encouraged the old man in his hope that sculpture might become his profession.

Tom Longfield had passed his examinations and was at Sandhurst; Margaret was at school in France. Dick had no other friends of his own age at Farinder, and his life was now very quiet. The influence of his surroundings was manifest; he ceased to long for wild adventure; his heart was no longer set on going into the army, but he stored his

brain with books of old romance. For the present, his ideal was in a world of imagination, and not in a world of action. Mr. Wrixon was confident that he would find his vocation in art; but Humphry believed that there was an undercurrent of restlessness in his nature, and that in the world of action, only, he would be content.

The time came when a decision had to be made, and Dick consulted Humphry on the subject.

'Now what do you consider,' he asked him, 'the finest thing a man can be? I may as well choose the best.'

'I see you want to be a hero,' replied Humphry. 'The easiest way is to become a politician, but for that you have not the necessary qualifications. The next is to be a prominent ecclesiastic with hazy views, but,

alas! I fear you have not the necessary piety. Fighting, except perhaps the occasional cuffing of disorderly Africans, has ceased to be a function of the army—besides with only a couple of hundred a year you can't afford the army. There is a good chance for an active man as a professional cricketer; and the man of science, if he only has the good fortune to discover anything which is humiliating to his race, may win notoriety. It seems to me, old fellow, that you are not fit to be a hero.'

'Who wants to be?' said Dick. 'I said nothing about heroes. But I must be something. I might as well choose a thing really worth doing, and you haven't left anything.'

'What do you feel good for yourself?'

'Almost anything.'

'That's capital, Dick. Do you think you

could write poetry? We want a new poet very much.'

'No, I should think not!'

'What do you say to sculpture?'

'I should never be good enough.'

'Do you like it?'

'I'm getting to like it more and more.'

'Well, you think about it seriously, Dick. You can't get rich at it, but it's honest, clean work, and you may let off all your bottled-up poetry on it, and even have admirers if you do it nicely, and consider it worth while. But think it well over. Sculpture will never make you a popular hero in England.'

The result of this conversation and some after meditation was that Dick delighted Mr. Wrixon's heart by announcing to him that he desired to become a sculptor. It was true that in this he did not wholly realise his

dream of a career, but nothing else seemed so promising; and why, he argued, in spite of Humphry, who laughed at everything heroic, should he not, through this noble art, bring honour to his name and race? Fear of ridicule made him silent about his ambitions before Humphry, but when Margaret Longfield came home from France he confided some of his hopes to her. She did not sympathise much with his choice of a profession. She was disappointed that he was not going into the army. She objected to her old chum, the reckless Dick, talking seriously about art. She chaffed him, told him his hair wanted cutting, but supposed that long hair was good for a sculptor, and promised to ride with him next day if he would not talk nonsense. Dick was highly offended, but next day he rode with her,

and there was no more reference to art or ambition. They were no longer lovers, but they were friends to the heart's core. Dick perhaps accepted the new relationship as too final to please Margaret.

She felt it later on, when the time came to say good-bye, and he left home to begin the world as a student of sculpture in London. Dick was then eighteen; Margaret two years younger, a light-hearted girl, fresh as a breezy morning, cool, but with promise of warmth later on. Her figure was charming, her face provoked doubt. Different eyes read it differently. She was thought plain by none, pretty by many, — beautiful no one had called her. After he had gone there was a shade of vexation on her face as she thought of his leave-taking. She had allowed him to give her a kiss, but then

what a brotherly kiss it had been. Not that she was in love with him, she was quite sure about that; but she would willingly have felt that she had the power of awakening his love if she cared to do so. She was very young, but a girl begins early to enjoy the feeling that the fountains of love in male hearts are responsive to her touch—obedient as those in the rock of the wilderness to the hand of Moses. Unfortunately, when she does smite definitely, with the object of making the fountain flow, it is too often on irresponsive clay; and subsequently she may find the fountains in the way which convenience and circumstances arrange for her, as it were through the taps of the local water company.

Humphry Wrixon said good-bye to his nephew with a mixture of amusement and

solicitude. He was amused at the magnitude of his expectations, his unbounded faith in human nature: he perceived inevitable disillusion, and consequent unhappiness. He counselled him to beware of hoping too much of the world, but to little purpose. Dick was in love with life, and such warnings were like those of a discreet friend who points out the imperfections of a lady to her worshipper.

CHAPTER VI

ADVENTURES OF A TRAMP

England laughed in young green under dappled skies of early June; the wind sang of the sunshine; the orchards were in blossom; the swallows dropped in a line on a rail and then dived again across the meadows; long waves of wind passed, leaving the near trees silent, and a minute afterwards they were sounding in the distance among the trees across the field. There was a prodigality of light everywhere,—fountains of gold, wells of green; an overflow of light in a

world which tossed and waved in warm gladness.

Dick had chosen to begin his career on foot. Of the breadth of England unknown and unexplored, which lay between him and London, more than half had been traversed. The beauty and solitude of the west was behind him: the country was flatter, the towns were more frequent, travellers on the road more numerous. This journey, this setting out to face the world, appeared to him an occasion of great importance, befitting adventure; but hitherto no adventure had been granted.

He had made good stages of some five-and-twenty miles each day, resting by night at village inns or farmhouses, fraternising with every one he met, eating a meal whenever a chance of one was offered. One

morning he rose with the farm labourers and was on foot in dewy lanes before sunrise. Whenever there was a stream to be found he ended a day's tramp with a plunge. After dinner he would sit with the village folk and smoke. Humphry had warned him against the practice of smoking, but had, nevertheless, made him a farewell present of a pipe. Dick was well pleased with himself and with the world; he was satisfied that nothing could really go wrong with either.

One evening, when he was some three days' journey from London, he drew near a large village from which came sounds which struck strangely on the wonted quiet of the summer nightfall, — sounds of the steam organ and the shooting gallery, voices of revellers in swing-boats and merry-go-rounds,

for this village celebrated its annual fair. Dick found a fine old inn here, mellowed with three hundred years of hospitality, and a landlord whose appearance was in harmony with his house. After dinner he went to the door and surveyed the street. The fair was at its height. Twilight had come, but the street blazed with the flickering lights of paraffin torches. The drone of the steam organ of the merry-go-round was mixed with the hoarse voices of the proprietors of cocoa-nut stands, the shouts of country lads, and the screams of girls in the swing-boats. In an open space opposite the inn a man on a stage informed people that a circus performance was about to commence. Hard by the superior attractions of a fat woman and a living skeleton were offered.

'Lively, isn't it?' remarked the landlord, joining him at the door.

'Yes,' said Dick. 'I think I shall go and have a shy at a cocoa-nut. By the way, what does "Billings's entire" mean on the sign under the Battle Axes?'

'Oh,' said the landlord, 'this here's a brewers' house.'

'What is that?'

'A many don't know,' replied the landlord, enjoying the boy's ignorance of the mysterious sign. 'And you've never heard of Billings's? Well, to be sure!' He proceeded to explain that these great brewers owned a hundred and twenty houses—this being one of them—and that he was himself only a caretaker. Dick was deeply disappointed, the glory of the old inn departed; he went off to throw at cocoa-nuts in disgust.

By and by he found himself inside the circus tent. A band of three brass instruments produced sounds in comparison with which those of the steam organ were soothing; the air was stifling; the smell of dead trodden grass was mixed with that of oil lamps; vacuous laughter greeted the witticisms of a clown in the ring; a man in a frock-coat announced the appearance of Linda, the tight-rope walker. Dick thought he had seen nothing before so melancholy. Linda was a woman of five-and-twenty; she had probably been good-looking, but her face was hard and worn; there was no trace of a smile on it as she walked across the stretched rope; she made no response to the applause; she had been doing the same thing during the whole afternoon; she had done it week after week and month after month. She

might once have been ambitious of pleasing a more imposing audience, and now cared little for the applause she won from village lads: she looked hopelessly weary and disappointed.

Dick was on the point of quitting the tent when the man in the frock-coat announced that the marvellous child, Connie, the renowned equestrienne, would appear.

The sad woman withdrew: there was a flourish of trumpets, and a girl of twelve or thirteen entered on a piebald pony. Her face was radiant, her dark eyes flashed. She was so handsome that the tawdry finery in which she was dressed looked picturesque. She nodded to the audience familiarly, and acknowledged their applause with gratified smiles. Then she went through her performance, standing on one leg on the ambling pony's back, flying through a hoop, jumping

to the ground and springing again to her seat with much skill. When she had finished she again bowed. She did more, she made a witticism at the expense of the policeman at the tent-door; she outraged the feelings of the assistant overseer by kissing her hand to him (he had come in, not for amusement, but as a solemn parochial duty to see that the performance was respectably conducted); she caught Dick's eye and she winked at him. Loud shouts of approval terminated her performance.

Dick left the tent and walked through the noisy street sadder than when he had entered. In a few years, he thought, this child will be hopeless as that woman. His was the time of sentiment. He pictured her evil surroundings, and longed to see her removed from them. He had taken a sudden and violent

dislike to the person who appeared to be the proprietor. He took another turn at the cocoa-nuts, fixing on one of them to represent this individual, and did not leave the stand, where his extravagance was watched by an interested little crowd, until he had felled his enemy. Returning, he again passed the circus: the commencement of a fresh performance was being proclaimed. The thought of the dreariness of its repetition made him curious to see how the actors would behave, and he re-entered. The audience was smaller, the brass instruments louder,—for the band was in liquor,—the air more stifling, the rope-walker sadder than before; but Connie came in as radiant as ever. She went through the same postures, smiled the same smiles, and seemed no less flattered by the applause which greeted her.

She recognised Dick again with a look of triumph. She believed that he had come back to look at her; she had made a conquest. She was a child in years, but no child in other respects.

Half an hour after, when the last performance was over, an unpleasant episode took place behind the scenes. Connie was going to the van where she slept, when the man in the frock-coat came up to her. The girl looked half afraid, half angry.

'Come, Connie, my dear,' said the man, 'let's have no more stand-offishness. Come, let's be friends, my beauty.' He put his arm round her waist and attempted to kiss her.

Connie flung an ugly oath at him and ran frantically to the sleeping-quarters of the tight-rope dancer; when she was safe within she bolted the door. It was dark, and the

other girl was nearly asleep. Connie lay down beside her and made a plan.

By degrees the village grew silent; the drone of the steam organ had ceased; the drunken rustics had sung their last chorus; the sounds of the summer night were audible again. Dick lay awake thinking of the circus child. The scent of the country found its way through the open window. Life was very beautiful, though a new feeling of its sadness had touched him. But nothing was really wrong with the world yet. Sleep soon came to him from over the fields, disguised in the wandering song of a brook.

But while he was asleep, the child who had troubled his thoughts was up and doing. As soon as everything was quiet, she wrapped a cloak round her finery and stole through the deserted village street into the open

country along the London road. She had made up her mind to run away.

Against the showers of spring, which are admittedly good for the land, the civilised world is accustomed to hoist umbrellas. The world treats the enthusiasm of youth, without which life would soon dry to barrenness, in much the same way. Probably the reason may be found in the fact that both the showers and the enthusiasm are undiscriminating—pouring alike on the shy primrose and the caustic old bachelor. Dick had just now abundant store of sympathy and enthusiasm for indiscriminate diffusion. He was led into some absurdities and encountered some ridicule in consequence. The day after his visit to the circus was memorable to him in this respect: it began with a misplaced sympathy which made him the

unhappy owner of a very stubborn donkey. About an hour after starting, as he was passing through a scattered hamlet on the edge of a common, he saw this donkey; it was heavily laden with brushwood, and its master was belabouring its hind legs with many blows. Between his whacks, which were delivered in an unconscious fashion, the man, as he passed, exchanged greetings with village acquaintances. Pity for the donkey, wrath against the man, urged Dick to intercession and strong words. He was forgetful that, whatever may be the modern sentiment about horses and wives, every Englishman has a perfect right to beat a donkey. The donkey himself seems to recognise this as part of his condition, nor particularly to object, otherwise would he prefer to go his own pace with stripes rather

than his master's idea of pace without them?

The man eyed Dick composedly, repeating his words with a fine imitation of his manner, which brought simultaneous grins to the countenances of five friends who had come up to see the row. Explosive laughter followed, and the proprietor of the animal further asserted his rights by a fresh attack. He had not calculated on dealing with such a hot-headed youth. Much as Dick resented the treatment of the ass, he still more objected to the man's manner to himself.

'Oh!' said he, 'you're cheeky, are you, as well as brutal? See how you like it yourself.' And he treated him to half-a-dozen blows of his stick, which produced howls.

The man made no attempt at resistance; he saw that his enemy was too strong for

him, and, having wriggled himself free, placed the shadow of the law between them, calling upon his five friends and others who had appeared, to bear witness to this shameful outrage. One of them indignantly asked the company, Whose donkey it was, he should like to know, if not Joe Larkins's? Joe Larkins's donkey, yes, and what right had any one to interfere between a poor honest man and his moke?

The law of conservation of energy, which shows us how the failure of a missile to rebound from a mark becomes converted into heat, illustrates how it happened that Dick's blows, though not returned, became converted into bad language in Mr. Larkins's mouth. The energy which failed to raise his arm loosened his tongue, and, if any well-equipped man of science had been present,

he might have demonstrated the principle referred to by showing that the heat of the language was an exact equivalent to the motion of the stick which his back had retarded. During this abuse Dick walked away, but he was followed by the whole party. They did not intend to let him off so cheaply. The law was again mentioned, his name demanded. One, wise in his village, advised him to settle out of court, remarking that Joe was a forgiving creetur, and might square for ten bob. A grinning boy informed him that the moke would have to pay for it when he was gone; trust Joe, he would lick that moke for bringing this trouble upon him. And this last shot told. How was he to know that the man would not continue to ill-treat the poor animal? He would not offer him money to be humane.

What could he do? Another suggestion from the crowd resulted in a bargain.

'Perhaps you'd like to buy the little donkey,' said the voice; 'just suit you, sir, he'd carry your weight beautiful.'

Dick showed a disposition to treat, and Mr. Larkins, being in pecuniary difficulties, and seeing a possibility of doing well for himself, allowed expediency to triumph over indignation, and commenced to speak the praises of his ass—its likeliness, its speed, its willingness, except on rare occasions when the stick was necessary, and the donkey knew it. Shortly afterwards a bargain was concluded, and Joe Larkins returned with his friends to the village inn with four sovereigns, while Dick, leading the donkey and somewhat embarrassed by his possession, departed slowly over the hill.

At first he thought he would make arrangements at the next railway station for sending the donkey to Farinder for Nan's use, but before they had travelled far together he decided that they must part, that he must sell him at a sacrifice to the first comer—give him away if need be. The stubbornness of the ass was such that Dick was guilty of the inconsistency of himself adopting the treatment which he had condemned in Mr. Larkins. At noon he left his friend to graze by the roadside, while he went into a field adjoining, and sat down to reflect under a hay-rick. Before long he heard sounds of laughter, and a waggon appeared on the road. Perched up beside the driver he saw Connie. She had slept on the previous night in a shed, and was now taking advantage of a lift for a few miles of the

road. Looking over the hedge she saw and recognised Dick, and immediately said good-bye to the waggoner, and jumped down.

'Hullo!' she said, taking a seat beside him on the loose hay, 'I never thought as I should see you again.'

'Well!' said Dick, much amazed. 'What on earth brings you here?'

'You ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies,' said Connie. 'P'r'aps I'm on the spree, like yourself. Well, what did you think of our show last night?'

'Very poor,' he replied, looking at her with much amusement.

'Oh, indeed! Well, why did you come in twice? You couldn't keep away. Did you come to look at me?'

Dick found it difficult to explain.

'That was it,' she continued. 'Well, I liked the looks of *you*.'

'Where are you going to?' asked Dick.

'"Where are you going, my pretty maid?" I'm going to London, sir, she said. And now you'd ought to ask: "May I come with you, my pretty maid?"'

The boy could not keep pace with her.

'Well, now, it's my turn to ask questions,' she continued. 'Where are you going to?'

'Oh! I'm going to London too, at least I'm going to walk to Riplow to-day, and then on by train.'

'I'm running away,' said Connie more seriously.

'Running away? Who from?'

'From our show. My! won't they be in a fix to-night. They'll have to give up the

performance.' She laughed exultingly when she thought of it.

'Why?' asked Dick, much interested. 'Tell me about it.'

'You won't go back on me. You'll stand in as my pal?'

'Yes, I will.'

Connie looked at him critically, to assure herself of his good faith. 'I think you're straight,' she said. 'Well, me and the boss fell out last night; he treated me shameful. I hate him. I can't abide him, the viper.' Her eyes blazed with indignation.

'Did he hit you?'

'No; he was always hanging about trying to kiss me. I wouldn't have minded if I'd liked him, but—oh! he's a devil.'

'My poor child,' said Dick, from the magnificent pinnacle of his eighteen years.

'Oh, child indeed!' exclaimed Connie. 'P'r'aps I'm not such a kid as you think. I'm nearly thirteen, and I daresay I could teach you a thing or two.'

'Well,' said Dick, 'if that blackguard bothered you, you were quite right in bolting. But have you friends to go to, or anything?'

'I shall stay with a lady friend to-night at Riplow,' she answered, lying. 'Then I shall go on to relations in London.'

'Have you any money?'

'No. Are you going to lend me some?'

'Yes, if you like. And how are you going to get to Riplow? Walk?'

'Yes. We might as well go along together if you'll have me. Will you?'

Dick looked at her curiously; she was arrayed in her professional garments, but

they were partly hidden by a cloak. Like most people of his age, he was sensitive as to appearance, though he fancied he was indifferent about it, and the thought of being seen in such strange company was dismaying. However, he reflected that he was likely to meet no one for whose opinion he could care on these country roads, and the child was in need of a protector.

'Oh, yes; come along. We'll go together,' he said, cheerfully.

Connie perceived that he had hesitated. 'You're real kind,' she said, 'and you're a toff.'

'What's a toff?'

'Oh,' she laughed, 'a swell, one as fancies himself. My aunt! if some of your folks was to meet you travelling with me, wouldn't you get talked to, just.'

'I don't mind what any one thinks about me,' said Dick. 'I do what pleases me. Do you think, though, you'll be able to walk all the way to Riplow? It's thirteen miles. By the way, I've a donkey here. I know you can ride. We might make use of him; he could carry you part of the way.'

'You don't tell me as that moke's yours!' cried Connie. 'Well, you're a comic!'

It was curious that immediately Connie was on the donkey's back his speed became all that could be desired. Perhaps her training in the circus had given her a subtle influence with animals, perhaps the ass was proud of carrying a lady; at all events the stick was no longer needed. Dick walked at the side and continued to converse with his new friend. She needed no inducement to talk; she was communicative about her-

self, but mixed fiction freely with her facts. He gathered that her mother was French, and belonged to a circus, and had been deserted by her father, whom she believed to be of high rank. She had been taken care of by another circus lady, and she had begun soon to take part in the performance herself. She was reticent about the relatives in London to whom she was going, but she seemed quite happy, and laughed at Dick's solicitude for her safety.

'You bet I know how to look after myself,' she said. 'I know my way about.'

After they had been travelling about an hour, they halted at a village for refreshment. The novelty of going to an inn with a gentleman pleased Connie mightily.

'They'll think as we're on our honeymoon,' she remarked, as they drew up at the

door. 'This is about the best lark I ever had.'

'You cheeky little beggar,' said Dick, 'if you don't behave yourself I won't go in with you. Pull that cloak well round you and don't let them see your dress.'

The landlord eyed the pair with severity. Dick was somewhat ashamed: he spoke a word or two of explanation to him aside, and ordered lunch.

'Well,' said the landlord, amused and half-incredulous, 'there's no knowing what games young gentlemen are up to nowadays. Anyhow, it's no business of mine.'

Dick went out to look after the ass. In his absence Connie assumed an air of dignity with the attendant maid. 'Could you show me a room,' she said magnificently, 'where I can wash? We found the roads rather dusty.'

She looked very fresh when she came down again. She kept on her cloak, but had removed her hat, and her fine black hair fell abundantly over her shoulders.

'Ah,' said Dick, 'you've been polishing up.'

'Yes; do I look nice?'

'Very.'

'You admire me, don't you?'

'Oh, you're not bad,' he admitted.

'You won't say it, but you know I'm pretty. Prettier than those ladies you know, though they have finer dresses and that.'

He was disposed to give her a lecture on vanity, but could only laugh. The meal was a very pleasant one: they were both hungry; the cold beef and ale were excellent; tea was provided for Connie.

'Fancy you and me mealing here together

like two old friends,' said she. 'I wish we were going on together for days and days. Well, now I think of it, I don't even know your name. I told you mine.'

'Malory,' he informed her.

'And what's your christian name?'

'Dick.'

'I suppose you'd be cross if I was to call you Dick.'

'No. I shouldn't particularly mind. We shall probably never see each other again after to-day.'

Connie looked almost sad. 'No,' she assented, 'and I don't suppose that troubles you. Well, let's be jolly.'

She had a few shillings in her pocket: before leaving the inn, relying upon Dick to replenish her funds, she magnificently bestowed half-a-crown on the girl who had

shown her to her room. Dick brought round the donkey, and, after Connie had taken her seat and waved adieu to the landlord, the travellers set out on the journey to Riplow, which was about nine miles distant.

CHAPTER VII

THE OBTRUSION OF A DONKEY UPON A FASHIONABLE PARTY

One Sir Compton Dando, when an over-due death brought him fortune in money, was commended by his friends for his wisdom in building a new house on the banks of the Thames, instead of enlarging the inaccessible and dilapidated family mansion in Cornwall. He was considered fortunate in his site, which sloped pleasantly to the river, in its position some three-quarters of an hour by rail from London, and in the good taste and skill of his archi-

tect. When it was suggested that he had perhaps been his own architect, he allowed it to be understood that Mr. Quoin was not unindebted to him for the design, though in the matter of staircases and chimneys and so forth, that gentleman had had a free hand. Sir Compton shared the national sentiment in favour of the comfortable beauty of the river Thames, with its pleasant breadths of sunny water, happily flowing among the lands of the prosperous and by the cottages of the contented,—England's beauty, as it were, mirroring her prosperity.

There had been picnicking on the river. Disembarking at the landing-stage above Riplow, the neighbouring town, the party presented a pretty picture of gracefully-attired men and women. Indeed, men have at such times an opportunity not often

afforded to them of indulgence in colour, and of returning to the original superior brilliancy of male plumage.

Tom Longfield was assisting Miss Chillington to land. When she took his hand in stepping from the boat her movements endowed him with a sudden grace not his own. Of her beauty there could be no doubt, though many people considered it was marred by an expression of self-possession, unbecoming in a girl so young. It occurred to Tom that if the landing-place had been muddy, she was the sort of woman for whom one would have felt impelled to throw down his boating coat of many colours, as Raleigh his velvet mantle, and that she would have stepped on it as if she were doing him an honour. Her whole appearance gave the impression of careful study,

even in the simple boating dress which she now wore. She was a girl of seventeen, with the confident air of a woman of the world.

A bend in the river and a sudden view of Riplow pulled her up, and gave Tom another opportunity of admiring her figure as she stood with elbow and hand lifted to shade her eyes. Miss Askew, passing at the moment with Archdeacon Pomfret, observed her, and wondered to her companion whether Miss Chillington knew what a pretty foreground she made to a picture. (It should be chronicled that she was the daughter of Mr. Justice Askew, who was at the time of her birth a Crown Counsel terrible in cross-examination, and that her younger sister, who was born after he became a judge, was more tolerant to human weaknesses.) Perhaps if Miss Chillington had known how

approvingly the Archdeacon had looked at her as he passed she would not have made fun of his appearance to her companion.

'If it is true that your profession and the Archdeacon's are the most popular with women,' she said, 'you certainly have an advantage over your rivals in your uniform, but you miss the opportunity of wearing it in private life, for indeed you cannot wear your sword on the river, Mr. Longfield. Well, I really think the Church should show more discrimination — it should no more select an archdeacon without calves than a precentor without a voice. Look, now, at our poor attenuated friend in front.'

Tom laughed as he looked, but not freely. The remark did not come up to his standard of the truly feminine ; for it is curious how the very men who will speak most lightly of

women to each other are unusually exacting in their demands for false refinement in the ladies of their own circle. Tom had still an honest respect for women, but he had caught many of the modes of thought of some of his less sturdy associates, and to his thinking there was a shadow of indelicacy in her admission of the fact that she was aware of the existence of the human calf. However, he remembered as an excuse for her that she was Irish, and the next minute he was her worshipper again. He was conscious of a special effort to show himself in her presence to his best advantage, and also of a feeling of dissatisfaction with the result. He felt some undefinable superiority in her, which certainly was not asserted in her frank speech and laugh, and was probably negative and traceable to a failure on her part to recognise the

established attitude of man, and play becomingly to his part of referee.

A bend of the river showed the approach of unusual figures—Dick, Connie, and the donkey. The evening being warm, Connie had taken off her cloak; she was mounted; her spangles sparkled in the sunshine. Dick walked at the side with the bridle on his arm. He had not calculated on meeting a fashionable party on the towing-path.

'My aunt!' cried Connie, 'here's a joke. Here comes a lot of swells.'

Dick felt very uncomfortable; he was inclined to turn back, but it was too late.

'Just put that cloak on, Connie,' he said. 'Fasten it up tight. What idiots we must look!'

Connie did as she was desired, but with a protest. 'Oh! if you're ashamed of me,'

she said, 'you can hide till they're past. Why don't you go and hide in them bulrushes, like young Moses?'

'What an extraordinary couple!' exclaimed Miss Chillington to Tom as they drew closer. 'The man looks like a gentleman, but do look at the girl on the donkey.'

A minute later Tom Longfield and Dick had recognised each other. It would be difficult to say which of them was the more confused—probably Tom. He was the elder; nothing smote him harder than a ridiculous position; Miss Chillington was at his side, the rest of the party coming up; he was utterly ashamed for his friend's absurdity. On the other hand, directly the position became apparent to them, both Miss Chillington and Connie enjoyed it. Connie's inborn spirit of devilry became active. Miss

Chillington found the scene comic, and she took a mischievous delight in Tom's uneasiness. She had little reverence herself for respectability, and to see a young Englishman ruthlessly torn from his goddess made her merry.

'Well, Tom!' said Dick, taking off his cap and laughing shyly.

'Well, Dick, you're a funny chap.'

Dick was inclined to go on, and Tom would no doubt have allowed him to do so, but Miss Chillington begged to be introduced.

'This is my friend, Mr. Malory, Miss Chillington,' he said, with an effort; 'how he comes here and what he is doing he must tell us for himself.'

'I am on my way to London,' said Dick. 'I thought I'd walk as the weather was fine.'

The explanation was incomplete. Miss Chillington scrutinised him with amusement. Connie joined in the conversation. 'Yes, we're going to London,' she observed, with a wicked look at Tom.

Others of the party passed and criticised the group; and there were quiet smiles, for which Tom was on the look-out, and returned, to show that he was on the side of the smiles, not on the donkeys.

'I suppose,' continued Connie, 'it's me that puzzles you. You think it's a funny thing to meet your friend with one of my sort. Well, he's been very good to me. I say, Dick, I'm making the gent uncomfortable. I think I'd better ride on, and you can follow when you've had your talk.'

Dick saw that it was useless to attempt explanation, that he must accept the situation;

and he was irritated at Tom's supercilious and superior manner. It made him aggressive.

'Not a bit of it, Connie,' he said; 'I'll come with you.' He was fortified and rewarded by an approving look from Miss Chillington. Connie had also been influenced by that young lady. She had been inclined to be very audacious; she had even contemplated startling the party by standing on the donkey's back when the time came to move on, and putting him through a few circus evolutions, but Miss Chillington's presence subdued her, and as Dick had not been ashamed of her, she desired to show her gratitude.

'We met coming along,' she remarked. 'I was tired, and he gave me a ride on his moke.'

'You don't mean to say that donkey is

yours!' cried Tom. 'Are you going to ride him into London?'

'Yes, I think it is very probable,' Dick replied, uncompromisingly.

Tom pictured him on the donkey entering London from the west, and coming down the Row towards evening. Miss Chillington stroked the donkey's ears affectionately, and gave Connie a friendly smile.

'I'm afraid your countrymen would never stand it, Mr. Malory,' she said; 'the masses would rise. The donkey has a peculiar effect upon their imaginations. In Ireland we understand him better.'

'Oh, don't pet him,' cried Dick; 'he doesn't deserve it; he's the most ungrateful beast you ever heard of. He's for sale, Tom.'

Miss Chillington entered into conversation with Connie, and speedily learned something

of her story. Tom perceived her attitude, and became happier. He spoke to his friend with some of his old cordiality; he said he had been so surprised that he had forgotten to say how glad he was to see him again.

'And where do you stay to-night?' he asked. 'Riplow? Well, I'll come down to your inn—the Swan's the best—after dinner and have a talk. I'm awfully glad to see you. I'm off to Gib, you know, next week, and there's heaps to talk over.'

'Ah, not at all,' joined in Miss Chillington. 'Mr. Malory must not go to an inn—he must come up to Somerford, of course. Blaise!' she called to her cousin, young Dando, who was behind, and came forward fixing an eyeglass, 'this is Mr. Malory, an old friend of Mr. Longfield's, who is tramping across the country and just met us by

accident. You must persuade him to spend the night at Somerford instead of going to an inn.'

'Of course! take no refusal,' said the Lieutenant, nodding.

Dick hesitated. 'It is very good of you, but I am on foot, you know, and quite unpresentable.'

'Easily fit you up,' said Blaise, laughing, and looking at Connie; 'won't we, Longfield? And what about'—he was going to add 'the lady,' but he caught his cousin's eye and refrained.

'The easiest thing in the world,' Tom replied.

'Dinner at half-past seven,' added Mr. Dando. 'We shall expect you.'

'Of course — it is settled,' said Miss Chillington; and Dick had accepted the

invitation before he had time to hesitate further.

'I'll go on to Riplow and put up the donkey,' he said to Tom, 'and come up in time to dress for dinner. Connie, we must be going.'

'I like your friend immensely,' Miss Chillington remarked to Tom after they had parted. 'I shall make him tell me all about his adventures to-night. What a strange child that was—and so beautiful.'

'She had good eyes,' Tom admitted. 'Well, Dick always was a funny fellow.'

'That lady's just the finest-looking piece I ever set eyes on,' said Connie to Dick. 'And, my! wasn't she fixed up smart? Now, if I was got up like her—but it's no use wishing. And you wasn't ashamed of me.'

'No,' Dick replied, absently.

'But you'll forget me when you get up among your grand friends. I expect you'll fall in love with that young lady, and you'll never think of me again, I expect.'

'Of course I shall, and all the fun we had to-day.'

'You're not thinking about me at all,' she said, in a vexed tone; 'I see it by your look. You're thinking about that lady.'

CHAPTER VIII

MISS CHILLINGTON

THE evening sun filled the drawing-room with mellow light, and Sir Compton Dando beamed on his assembling guests. Man loves to have a *rôle*: his was that of host; he was insignificant in any other. When he left his house he left his power behind him, and he knew it,—in a bathing-machine he hardly felt like a baronet. But as a host he was great. It was he, not the sun of the south, who received credit for the vintage; he unconsciously felt a joint-authorship with the Creator in the view which he gave his

guests from the windows, and a joint-responsibility for the weather while they were with him.

On this occasion he felt himself specially fortunate in his guests. The House of Lords was represented by the Earl of Eigg; the Lower House by Mr. Frampton Cotterell, the member for Riplow; the Church by Archdeacon Pomfret; the law by the ladies of Mr. Justice Askew; diplomatic circles by Mr. Chillington; letters by Mr. Norton Tristram; and the army numerously. Business was also there, 'in two places'—to borrow a figure from the auctioneer,—in the person of the member for Riplow and that of a nephew of his own, who, having failed to gain admission to the army, had recently entered on a commercial career. The mother of this gentleman had not altogether approved

the choice, but had grown reconciled to it on the reflection that it was not an uncommon thing now for gentlemen of good family to go into business, and that a large fortune in the course of a few years was to be the certain and meet reward of the sacrifice.

While Sir Compton reviewed his assembling forces and arranged the order of march to dinner—Lady Dando having previously worked out this arrangement through all its permutations and combinations,—Tom Longfield brought Dick to his hostess, who was talking to the Archdeacon.

'Ah, Mr. Longfield,' she said, 'I was just telling Archdeacon Pomfret that the Bishop ought to be very much obliged to me for persuading him to pay us a visit, the river air has done him so much good already; he

works so hard, you know. What a pity you have to go to-morrow—but I really would not allow you to stay. I know what a mother's heart is, and of course your own people are the first claimants for the next week or two. It is a great comfort to have dear Blaise with us before he leaves, poor boy, though he says he must go to town next week to make arrangements.' Tom presented Dick. 'Oh, I am so pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Malory. What an original idea of yours to come through the country on a donkey! It is quite refreshing to meet people who do original things. Mr. Longfield, you know Miss Brosely, don't you? Mr. Malory, let me introduce you to Miss Beatrix Askew.'

When Miss Chillington came into the room she became the centre of a little group

of men, and even charitable women do not care to see one of their number engaging more than her share of attention. She provoked the criticism of two ladies who were looking at an album of engravings in the shelter of a recess.

'She is unmistakably handsome,' admitted the first.

'Yes, she is certainly good-looking, but it is a style I don't admire. She looks so conscious of her beauty, as though she demanded admiration.'

'Well, she gets quite as much as she deserves. Why, she's not eighteen. There are curious things said about her, my dear. If all accounts are true she is very fast.'

'Nothing serious, I hope.'

'Oh! not that I know of, but they say she has no becoming feminine reserve. She

talks to men as if she were a man herself, or perhaps more as men talk to women. My husband, who like the rest of them admires her, says she assumes the offensive instead of the defensive.'

'You know there are all sorts of stories about her wilfulness. One, of her being out hunting in Ireland when the fox crossed a flooded river, and one of the riders who followed had his horse drowned. She followed in spite of her father's orders. They say he threatened to horsewhip her if she was not drowned, and it is believed he afterwards did so.'

'Oh, the best story I have heard of her,' said the first lady, 'is about her conduct to little Mr. Shipton, the curate who was here last week. Jim told me to take it for what it was worth.'

'Whatever did she do to poor Mr. Shipton? Do tell me.'

'The story is that she was walking by the river with Mr. Shipton, and her little terrier contrived to fall in, and was nearly drowned. Mr. Shipton heroically went to the rescue, and came out holding the wretched dog, and looking a woeful sight with his long coat tails clinging round his legs. One of the gentlemen was walking near and saw it all. And what do you suppose Miss Chillington did? —ran impetuously up to him crying, "You dear, brave, little creature," and gave him a kiss.'

'Oh, it is too absurd,' said the other lady, laughing; 'they must have invented it in the smoking-room.'

'Not at all, my dear. I believe it is quite true. Only just fancy what Mr. Shipton

must have felt. You know he is engaged to that tall, plain girl with freckles — the girl we saw in church. He must have felt like a criminal with the secret of that kiss on his cheek.'

'Well, I could believe a good deal of her, but hardly her kissing Mr. Shipton. We might ask him if the dog really fell in, or if she threw it in to test his devotion, as De Lorge's lady threw the glove to the lions.'

'Or if he felt inclined to throw the dog in her face, as De Lorge threw the glove, or, being a Christian, to be forgiving and turn the other cheek.'

'Very good, but just a little profane, dear, and you know my feelings about the Bible. Ah! Major Anderson, have you had much difficulty in finding me? It would have served us right for hiding away if we had

been left behind and sent to bed without dinner, like naughty children.'

Dick was not feeling very happy; the subjects of conversation were entirely strange to him; of the theatres, the doings of the fashionable world, the musical and artistic gossip, the young men's allusions to yachting, or race-horses, or polo matches, he knew nothing: he was envious of the men who were laughing with Miss Chillington. At dinner he was entrusted with the care of the younger Miss Askew, and had the wife of the Archdeacon for his other neighbour. Opposite were Miss Chillington and Norton Tristram, and this couple so engrossed his attention that he failed somewhat in his duty to his mess-mate.

'What a recluse you must be!' said she, after offering various conversational headings

which remained unamplified; 'you have never seen Mr. Irving act, and not read anything about Buddhism. Of course that sort of reading is dangerous. I suppose, like every thoughtful man to-day, you have been through a phase of religious doubts. It is hard nowadays to escape.'

'No,' said Dick, apologetically, 'I'm afraid I have not had them yet. Are you bound to have them?'

'How can you be so flippant?'

Religious doubts to the young lady were more sacred than faith itself. To Dick there was something very comical in the subject as a topic for conversation at dinner, but he had seen little of the world.

'You cannot accept everything?' she asked.

'I do,' he answered; 'I'm like the school-

master in our village; he can't read very long words himself, and when a boy stumbles at one he tells him "to call it summat and go on." I do that with puzzles.'

'Then you're very cowardly. You know what Tennyson says about "honest doubt"?'

Dick hardly heard, he was watching Miss Chillington, whose eyes grew brighter as she spoke to the poet about her country.

'Oh yes,' he replied. 'I remember. It's very pretty.'

'Pretty! surely that's hardly the word. Well, I envy you your peace of mind. Thank you, a paté.'

The gentleman sitting next her now engaged her in conversation on the coming regatta at Henley, and Dick was left at leisure to watch Miss Chillington. He thought she looked even more beautiful than

when he had first seen her; her colour was brighter, her forehead and the golden brown hair which shadowed it had before been hidden by her hat. Her figure was as beautiful as her face; but where other ladies were prodigal in their poverty she was exclusive in her wealth, and wore a dress which showed but little of her neck. She gave the impression of extreme finish in detail, of fulfilling in her person Mr. Ruskin's demand for architecture—that it should be as carefully executed where hidden as where seen, the column capital as lovingly completed where it was turned to the wall as to the congregation.

Tristram, her companion, was at first disappointing to Dick, who had read a volume of his poems which he had found among Humphry's miscellaneous collection of books.

He had formed an ideal conception of a poet's appearance, and to this Tristram did not conform; he was like other men—without suggestion of romance: his countenance seemed rather that of the world-weary man of pleasure than of the inspired singer.

He and Miss Chillington were on excellent terms. Dick heard her reproach him for his ignorance of Ireland, speaking with a slight Irish intonation which was to the poet one of her many charms.

'We don't want to be part of the English Empire which you think such an honour,' she was saying; 'we cannot, and will not, forget the past; but if you do consider Ireland part of your country, why do you allow the peasantry to be starved out of it and go to America in thousands every year?'

'Oh, I wish you would not say "you,"' replied Tristram; 'say England.'

'Yes, I do say "you,"' she continued, 'because it is just such men as you—a poet who loves freedom and justice, and is outside the interest of any class—who should be our champion. Ah! if only we had a great poet of our own. It is a great thing to fight for your country: it is still greater to give your country something to make it worth fighting for. An English soldier has to fight for England's wealth: the army is in the service of trade. It is the artist and the poet who keep its ideals fresh. A poet is what we want, to express our own ideal for us. We have no voice to speak our hopes and our wrongs. We are not ready for our Mazzini; we should not understand him.' Tristram looked at her with great approval, but it was

the speaker, not the subject, that interested him. 'A poet would find Irish hearts less difficult to stir than English,' she continued.

'Perhaps so,' said Tristram. 'I have been accustomed, in my darkness, to look upon the difference between the English and Irish people as similar to that between a man who has had too much to eat and one who has had too much to drink.'

Miss Chillington laughed. 'It is clear that patriotism is no longer a necessary part of the equipment of a poet. Well, you will come and see for yourself, will you not? My father will be with us in the autumn for a few weeks, and you must come then. If you are disappointed in the people we can give you scenery.'

Mrs. Pomfret became a trickling tributary to their conversation, and spoke of moun-

tains: 'They give us such a sense of mystery and sublimity, and of the smallness of our own life.'

'A recent president of the Alpine Club quotes an old writer who justified the Creator for making mountains—which the ancient world regarded as a nuisance—solely on the ground that they harboured fur-yielding animals,' observed Tristram.

The younger Miss Askew remarked that though fur was indispensable, *she* considered that the mountains had a yet higher use. She forgot the world when she was in the presence of the mountains.

'The longer I live,' said Mrs. Pomfret, 'the more I feel the truth of the saying that "God made the country and man made the town."'

'Don't you think an exception might be

made in favour of cathedral towns?' said Miss Chillington, slyly.

'I alluded to manufacturing towns, my dear,' replied Mrs. Pomfret, with dignity.

Miss Chillington turned to her neighbour on the right—the business nephew of the house of Dando.

'I suppose you are quite a learned man of business now, Sam,' said she, 'and know all about stocks and dividends and things.'

Sam remembered the nature of the official duties of which he had become master. He spoke solemnly. 'There is a fearful amount to learn, you know, and I can't say I have it all at my fingers' ends, you know, but I am told these sort of things come all at once to you.'

Mr. Tristram asked if this happy result were obtained by a laying on of hands by the

senior partner, or some such sacramental process.

'We shall hear of you waking up some morning and finding yourself rich,' said Miss Chillington. 'After your day's business it must be pleasant to have your evenings to yourself. Now, tell me, do you read much?'

'Well, no'—

'And why so?'

'Well, the fact is, I have so little time,' said Sam, 'and there are so few good books, you know.'

'Oh, Sam,' said his cousin, laughing gaily, 'you are too severe—too severe altogether. Now, isn't he, Mr. Tristram?'

Lady Dando exchanged glances with the Countess of Eigg and rose. A warm evening and a rosy north-west attracted many of

the ladies from the drawing-room to the garden. The men gathered closer round their host, who gave biographical hints about the wine.

Dick's shyness was gone; he desired to talk. He asked his neighbour, a large, vacant-looking soldier, whom he had heard making allusion to Egypt, what he thought of the Pyramids. 'Oh, they're damn rum things, you know; damn rum things,' replied the Major, whereupon the conversation came to a close. Tom Longfield came round and took a chair beside Dick.

'And seriously,' he asked, 'you have decided on being a sculptor? Is it good enough?'

'Oh, I suppose so; you must be something,' Dick replied.

'I never understood how a sculptor earned

his living,' grumbled Tom. 'Making monuments, or how? Well, I'm sorry, old fellow.'

'Oh, nonsense,' said Dick, impatiently. 'If you're good enough you can serve your country as well by art as by fighting.' He was recalling what Miss Chillington had said.

'I should like to know how.'

'Well, you can stir the heroism in your country and celebrate its heroes, for instance.'

'Oh, I know, those statues in St. Paul's,' said Tom; 'Victory presenting the naked admirals with wreaths—ridiculous things. I don't believe you'll stick to it either. I say, they're on the move; we'll have a talk outside. I want to hear more about the jackass.'

The garden was beautiful under darkening skies and the first stars. In addition to the light of heaven, Sir Compton Dando provided artificial illumination to cheer his guests. In a glow of limelight quartettes were being sung. The faces of the guests at Somerford were beautiful in their contentment. If what is known as a composite photograph could have been taken, the expression of the resultant face would have been one of gently smiling, kindly benevolence. Nay, if the representative were clothed in white robes, it might even have portrayed Charity—Charity well born, that is, and seen at a moment when she was thinking more of what she had done than of what remained to do. Dick, perhaps, should have been excluded from the portrait, for he was restless. After a talk with Tom Long-

field he wandered about the garden alone, the possessor of some new sensations. Miss Chillington had fired his thoughts. His boyish enthusiasm for the heroic, which had contented itself with the imaginary or with the past, now turned to the actual and the present: the heroic was still to be achieved—he himself might achieve it. The few words he had heard her say to Tristram about the service of one's country by art inspired him with a longing to enter on such service; her own ardent love of her country showed to him patriotism as a great ideal within reach; it showed him how England should be loved; he could have wished, however, that it might have been his to attempt this by poetry rather than sculpture; sculpture was too cold for his present mood. Miss Chillington herself seemed to him more beautiful, more

admirable, than the unknown perfect maidens of his boyish dreams, and also as far removed from him — a princess beyond reach. It would be the supremest joy conceivable to do such work as might rank him in her eyes among those who deserve well of their country. And the cause of her country too! he would study that—it must be noble since she was devoted to it. Tristram was unworthy of himself as a poet, and of her appeal to him, in having been uninspired by her words. Might not he himself find the subject for his first great work in sculpture in that cause? Erin parting with her children, who were about to be driven into exile, or England, nobly generous, giving her back her children.

He subsequently mentioned the subject casually in one of his letters to Humphry,

and Humphry approved it, with the comment that a work which claimed to represent the national sentiment would be incomplete without the presence of the domestic pet of the national hearth; he thought that if the statue of Erin should be equestrian or rather pig-mounted it might take rank as a companion work of art with Europa and the Bull, or Una and the Lion.

CHAPTER IX

CONNIE

The transition from youthful sentiment to experience of the world of men is like that from the country to the town, where half-finished streets project into half-mutilated meadows: we are not tempted to linger. Beyond, in the city's dark mystery, lies another world of romance for such as are fearless in beholding and generous in judgment; beyond again, for these, paths outward to the mountains and the sea.

The process of disillusion is gradual. Like the ruddy complexion from the cheek of

youth, the first bloom of romance quits the soul; neither is wept for; each is remembered with kind laughter.

During the first few years of his life in London Dick's thoughts were less for his art than for the problems of life and the condition of his fellow-creatures. He gave much attention to the doleful pastime of reform; he startled Humphry in a letter by informing him that he had joined a society called the Asynepangelists,—the 'no-compromisers,' he translated it; he worked in the East End; he showed a tendency to Socialistic principles. He caused his uncle much amusement. 'These young souls, when they begin to boil and the lids come off, are very interesting,' he commented; 'there is nothing so comical as the earnestness of the young, and nothing so sad as the indifference of the old.'

The progress of disenchantment was steady; the work of reform did not progress; the society of Asynepangelists tottered; many of its most prominent members withdrew. The Honourable Thomas Molyneux Thynne Culbone, who had dropped the word 'honourable' so that he might earn the only real title to it by labouring for his fellow-creatures, resumed his rank; Mr. Tuam, whose conscience had told him that the land should be owned by the nation, and who, having a small property in Ireland, had presented this to the Government of the day, was very glad that the Government had refused to accept it; and young Featherstone, who had been so severe upon the Church, though he had a decanal parent, had taken holy orders. Dick himself had begun to find the work irksome. In his unbounded trust

of life he had at first refused to believe that anything could be wrong with the world. When he discovered his mistake he saw the imperfections of the earth as a lover sees the fault or pain of his lady. He did not shut his eyes, nor avoid the dark places; he felt that while these were unlightened he could not enjoy the beauty of the sunshine elsewhere; that it was service, not appreciation, which was first demanded. Now, with further acquaintance, the darkness deepened, the service looked less hopeful; he was impatient and disappointed.

Tristram, the poet, introduced him to his own circle of friends—artists, literary men, and others,—men very different from the Asynepangelists. They went, indeed, to the opposite extreme, allowing their conduct to be hampered by no restrictions whatever; and

Dick found the change pleasant. His new companions met with the disapproval of two men among his former associates whose true friendship he had gained. One of these was a working-man named Strong, a Socialist with brains ; the other, his fellow-lodger, one Clovis Cloudesley Shovel, a simple-minded and lovable creature, with a countenance which would have made the fortune of a comic actor.

Dick's new habits aroused Strong's scorn and awoke Shovel's anxiety, but he took his own way unconcerned by either. And just at the time when his ideas were in a muddle and his path undefined, his old friend Connie danced into his life and shaped it for him.

He had been to the East End to pay a visit to Robert Strong. After leaving him he walked towards the docks near the Tower of London, feeling depressed and unhappy.

The gloom of the November evening was thrice gloomy in those dark streets. Where there was any brightness—by tavern or music-hall—it was viler than the gloom; where there was any beauty—a pretty child with happy smiles for her ragged doll under a lamp, a Scotch mountain song played on a barrel-organ—it was sadder than the prevailing ugliness. He passed sailors with brawling women, clerks—the narrow-chested sons of our commercial prosperity—going home northwards from their warehouses, and some few of their masters, spruce and silk-hatted, stepping westward. There was no greeting, there was no brotherhood here. He was glad to get down near the ships; they revived his spirits; they told of an outlet from this prison; they spoke of far-distant seas and starry nights, and the lap of shoreless

waters against the dipping bows. And ships were coming in from the sea, and as they swung in the river to their berths, came the sound of the voices of the sailors as they hauled on the ropes. The memories of childhood touched his heart as he listened.

The condition of the world which he now saw, so different from the world which he had pictured, gave him serious thoughts as he walked homewards. It seemed to him that men had lost faith in each other and in their country and in earth and heaven, so that there was little room for pleasant wayfaring on the unknown road, or great sacrifice for the dear native land: there was no unity of purpose to make men brothers.

Near London Bridge he met Norton Tristram—an unwonted visitor east of St. Paul's.

'Ah, Malory!' he cried, 'well met. Now,

by your countenance, you've been howking the middens, "doing good." Am I not right? and I, where do you think I've been?'

'To Brighton, to get an appetite for dinner.'

'No. I have been sitting for two hours with a pious old lady, my great-aunt, who lives in lodgings at Clapham Common.'

'This is inconceivable,' said Dick.

'It is true. I am to sup to-night with some ladies of the theatrical profession and other merry friends—there is a charming Neapolitan among them,—and it occurred to me that it would give the entertainment a flavour if I spent the afternoon with my aunt. Virtue is my olive before the wine.'

Tristram had passed those days of comparative innocence when wickedness had been piquant to him, and now in the days

of his dissipation he found a comparative piquancy in innocence; he looked at it artistically. His deliberate seeking after new sensations marked him as one to whom Nature was no longer friendly. She is unindulgent to those who are over-careful about indulging themselves, dooming them to perpetual pursuit, and sending them to ugly places in search of new emotions. The freshness of Dick's nature, his enthusiasm for life, had attracted Tristram, by contrast to his own condition and that of the greater number of his friends. He had recently frequently invited him to his rooms, and had introduced him to his own companions and to a side of life which had many attractions.

'So you still stick to the slums,' he remarked.

'Only on the Clapham Common principle,'

said Dick. 'I'm going to the theatre to-night.'

'Not a bit of it, Malory; you go because you haven't yet got over your love for humanity. Now, if I went, I should go to get a few necessary shadows to make my picture of life interesting. I don't care a straw for the poor really. Indeed, I think the lower classes are horrid.'

'Yes, shocking,' said Dick, ironically.

'It's a good thing you're going to the theatre to-night, my boy; these expeditions make you cantankerous. If you get out of temper with life, Malory, you're ruined as an artist, though you may do for a reformer. I assure you that art and reform are sworn foes. Don't trouble about social problems, study individuals as they are. A landscape painter might as well vex his soul about

improving uncultivated lands by artificial manures. These are questions for the tiller of the soil.'

'I have a relation,' said Dick, 'who calls England the land of the well-fed Muse. "Pepsina," he calls her.'

'Interpret your relation to me.'

'I understand him to mean that she sings on a full stomach. That our art and our poetry are addressed to the well-to-do; that art has become a luxury merely, and endeavours no longer to stir the pulse of the nation, to express its pain, to plead for noble sacrifice or patriotism.'

'England!' said Tristram, contemptuously. 'To love art is to forget England—England of to-day. Some art may dwell here, but it has nothing to do with England.'

'Patriotism and poetry ought to go hand

in hand,' said Dick, warmly; 'we want a common cause and a common faith to unite us, and our poetry and our art ought to point to that. We are all going different ways, each selfishly playing for his own hand. In our religion, our politics, our morals, in everything we are divided. Some may be on the right track and the rest on the wrong. I believe in comradeship. If England is drifting—if half the world is going towards damnation—for God's sake let us all be damned together.'

'The devil!' exclaimed Tristram.

'And I believe we are drifting. I don't see what the remedy is to be unless we have some great disaster. I should like to see the money-lenders, and editors of financial papers and society papers, and sweaters persecuted to-day like the Jews were persecuted long ago. I should like myself to

assist in breaking up half the printing-presses and knocking down half the palaces and clubs and hotels in London.'

'Spare my club, you young firebrand,' said Tristram, laughing. 'I tell you, Malory, you are not fit to be an artist. You must give up the thought of it. Your mind ought to be occupied with Giovanni Dupré, and Wagmüller, and Rodin, and Flaxman. I swear I am getting an appetite. I am glad you are going to the theatre. I recommend the burlesque at the Gaiety.' He hailed a cab. 'If you have no engagement come to dinner on Tuesday.'

A few minutes after parting with Tristram Dick met another acquaintance.

'Hullo, Connie!' he cried, 'who'd have thought of meeting you?'

'Well, now, if this isn't ridiculous,' laughed Connie; 'I was just thinking of you.'

'Ridiculous,' agreed Dick, with doubts as to her veracity.

It was not their first meeting since they had travelled to Riplow together. Dick had seen her on two or three occasions recently; for Connie was acting as a model to one of his artist friends. According to her own account she had had many strange adventures since they had parted on the towing-path. All he knew for certain was that she had been engaged at one of the inferior music halls at the East End, and had afterwards taken an unimportant part in a pantomime at one of the large theatres. Here Headly, the artist, had seen her and approved her beauty. He had made her a liberal offer to sit as his model for a contemplated picture, and she had accepted. It pleased her to think that her beauty was appreciated;

her vanity, not the remuneration, made her consent. She was now about sixteen years old, but there was little about her which suggested childhood.

'And where are you off to, Connie?' Dick asked.

'I'm disengaged. Now, wouldn't you like to take me to some place of amusement? A pal asked me to come to tea, and go with her to a music hall after, but I'm not bound.'

'Very well, let's have a happy evening together. Come and have tea, and I'll take you somewhere afterwards. Will you?'

'Will I? Won't I just? But couldn't you make it dinner instead of tea? I should like to go just for once to a tip-top place where the toffs go, and there's a band. That's if you don't mind being seen with me.'

'Don't you think tea is more suitable for young ladies of your age?'

She glanced at him in a way to make him laugh.

'All right,' said Dick, 'it shall be dinner.'

'You're an angel. And after dinner we'll go to the theatre. I don't care a pin about the piece. I want to go to a place where I can see the swells. I'll be one myself to-night.'

'We ought to be in evening dress to go among the grand people at the theatre.'

Connie clapped her hands. 'What luck,' she cried. 'Now, what do you think I've on under my ulster? I've got on the Greek dress with a border same as the picture. Mr. Headly gave it me to-night to take away, because he had no use for it now the picture's done, and the girl that cleans the studio was outside, and I promised her I'd give her

a dress, because she's in rags; so I gave her my old 'un straight off my back and came away in this.'

They went to a well-known restaurant, an over-decorated haunt of the Philistine pleasure-seeker,—one of the places Dick had been anxious to rase to the ground when he was speaking to Tristram an hour before. But it was exactly what Connie desired. After taking off her ulster and arranging her hair she joined him in the passage, and walked into the dining-room before him with her head in the air. In her Greek dress, which she had drawn close at the waist to make it look more modern, she was amazingly handsome. Dick could hardly conceal his admiration.

'Will I do?' she asked him, with a confident air, as they took their places at a little table, under general scrutiny.

'What a transformation!' he laughed; 'it's Cinderella.'

'My boots ain't like Cinderella's, but it's a good thing they can't be seen. You'll buy me a pair of shoes, won't you, and a pair of gloves, before we go to the theatre?'

A waiter bent over the young lady:

'Purée de Pois St. Germain — Fausse Tortue Claire.'

Connie blushed slightly and hesitated for a moment. Dick helped her to choose.

'The people who come to these places like to have their food in French,' he told her; 'they think it is more refined.'

She was a little anxious at the commencement of the meal; she wished to be correct in her selection of fork, knife, or spoon, and watched her companion carefully; but her confidence soon returned, and her spirits rose high.

'Well, this is the sort of place for me,' said she, surveying the golden columns and cornices with rapture. 'And what swells they all look; nothing but shirt fronts and low necks all over the shop. And to think how soon it'll all be over! It's like Cinderella—got to be changed back again. You can just fancy how dismal it is at my lodgings; there's no one there at all but Emily—that's the slavey. Mother Pring's gone to Croydon to her sick daughter, and the other young person that lodges there's gone to stay with a friend. Emily's pious, and what do you think she does when she's got no work to do? She scrubs part of the kitchen floor, whether it wants it or not, to keep her thoughts off young men. I say! how many more courses?'

Dick's spirits were rising too. This

adventure with Connie was a relief after a depressing afternoon. He looked at her with satisfaction, partly on account of her beauty, partly because of her strange attire; he was pleased at his own indifference to appearances and to the criticism of others.

'This sort of thing, which you seem to like so much,' he said, laughing at her last remarks, 'is just what I hate. I'm sick of all this show. I feel more than half inclined to clear out, and go to the backwoods of America or somewhere.'

'My word! you don't mean it! Well, if you go, I wish you'd take me with you for company. What fun we had that day after I ran away!'

'Yes, hadn't we! Let me give you some champagne,' said the ex-Asynepangelist. 'And tell me what became of my donkey?'

'Oh! didn't I tell you? I sold him to an ostler at Riplow for a quid. I thought of you that evening among your grand friends. I liked the looks of that young man—your friend with the moustache.'

'He's in India now.'

'And the young lady—the handsome princess; I expect you got thick with her.'

Dick looked displeased; he had not seen Miss Chillington since that night, but she was often in his thoughts; he objected to discuss her with Connie.

'She lives in Ireland. Well, Connie, now the picture's finished, what are you going to do with yourself?'

'No more modelling for me,' said Connie. 'It's dull work; and if the artist hadn't been a bit fond of me, and come round now and then to make things lively, I could never

have sat still for so long. Well, I'm ambitious. I'm going in for the theatrical profession. I suppose I must be content with engagements at a music hall to begin with.'

Dick did not like the prospect for her, but he had no alternative to offer. 'I hate all these music halls,' he said. 'I wish you lived in a jolly country place like my home. There's nothing in all London as good as a country lane in the spring when a south-west wind is blowing, and a thrush——'

'"Oh, that we two were mying!"' cried Connie. 'I know that song, but this is November.' It was no use being sentimental with this young lady.

'It's an awful pity,' he added, 'that you have no nice friends—girls, I mean. I wish you knew some ladies.'

'I prefer gentlemen,' replied Connie.

It was time to go. Connie put on her waterproof again rather reluctantly, and they drove towards the theatre, after a pair of gloves and a pair of shoes had been purchased.

In the cab she slipped her hand into Dick's. 'I wonder at your being so shy,' she said. 'I mean, you never tried to give me a kiss and that, like some of them. Because, you know, you don't look good; you look like "don't care as came to the gallows." Do you love me at all?'

'Yes, very much, Connie.'

'The others take notice of me because I'm pretty; I know them. I don't suppose they care much about me. Well, here's the theatre. I say! I'm getting a bit funky about going in.'

Their seats were not in a conspicuous place, and they did not attract special attention from their neighbours during the performance, except once or twice when Connie laughed very loud indeed or made unusually audible comments; but when it was over Dick had a trial to go through. He was waiting for her in a crowded vestibule when she came over to him from the cloak-room carrying, not wearing, her ulster, and looking defiant.

'Wait and see who's coming out,' she said, as Dick took her ulster from her.

'Any one I know?'

'You bet. She may think herself very grand, but she stared at me in a way that I couldn't abide.'

'You didn't say anything to her, did you?' he asked, laughing.

'Well, I said, "It's me; perhaps you'll know me next time!"'

'Who is she?'

'You'll see fast enough. I believe she knew me, but was too proud to speak. Here she comes.'

It was Miss Chillington, who came out to her father, who was standing near Dick. As she caught sight of him, a smile of recognition came to her eyes; she seemed about to stop and speak to him when she saw Connie, who had taken his arm. The colour rose at the same instant to her face and Dick's, but a moment after she looked as cold as a statue, and passed on.

This was the young man who had prided himself on his independence of appearances and of the opinion of others. It was one of the most wretched moments of his life. As

they drove away in the cab he hardly heard what Connie was saying.

'She didn't seem inclined to be very friendly.'

'No, I suppose not, that is—I wish to goodness, Connie, you'd be more particular how you speak to ladies. You must have been very rude to her.'

'My aunt!' cried Connie. 'Here's a to-do! here's temper! I see how the land lies. You said you wished I knew some ladies. Why didn't you introduce me to her? And if you're ashamed of me directly you meet one of your friends, we can say good-bye at once. You can stop the cab now if you like.'

'Don't be a goose,' said Dick, who saw that he had no one to blame but himself, and was trying to make the best of his discom-

fiture. 'It makes no difference. But you are fearfully cheeky, you know.'

'Maybe I am,' said Connie, mollified by his tone. 'Well, there's no doubt she's a beauty. She might be the queen of Ireland from the way she walks and looks; and what a dress! white ostrich feathers on the body! and wasn't her hair spiff? I say! you're thinking about her again. It's funny, both times I've seen her I've been with you. She'll think there's something between us.'

Dick looked cross. 'Well, I hope you enjoyed yourself,' he said.

Connie twined her arm in his. 'You were a real dear to take me. Will you take me again, some day? Now we're pals again, aren't we?'

'Yes, rather. Look here, Connie, this is where I must get out; I want a walk after

the heat of the theatre. The cab can take you home.'

'Oh, come all the way,' said Connie, persuasively, 'and come in and see my room, and I'll make you a cup of cocoa for your supper. It will be fine to finish up the evening, and I'm all by myself.'

'Perhaps another evening—not to-night.' Miss Chillington was in his thoughts. He stopped the cab.

'Well,' said Connie, 'you've been very kind; you've been kinder than any one else ever was to me, and you can have a kiss if you want, and that's more than I'd give any one.'

CHAPTER X

A SUPPER PARTY

In the following spring Humphry Wrixon came up to London, and, as was his custom, took a room at the Tavistock Hotel. He had not written to let his nephew know that he was coming. For months very little had been heard from him at Farinder; but Humphry had gathered from his occasional letters that it was not well with him, and he determined to pay him a visit.

Humphry's prognostics of his nephew's development had been correct up to a point; but, as with those good men who prepare

forecasts of our British weather, however far-seeing may be the prophets who pronounce on the soul's morrow, unexpected and disturbing causes are constantly a source of perplexity. The fault is not with the meteorologist nor with the student of human nature; it must rest on the British weather and the human soul.

On the evening after Humphry's arrival in London he invited Professor Wintersea to dinner, and afterwards proposed that they should give Dick the pleasant surprise of a visit at his rooms. He was living at this time at Chelsea with Tristram and Headly, the artist.

It happened to be a special occasion among the Chelsea comrades, who had met at Tristram's rooms to celebrate the rejection of a picture which one of them had sent to

the Royal Academy. The gathering this evening had, too, the unusual attraction of ladies' society. The festivity was a freak of Tristram; the young ladies, who had acted as models to the artists present, had been entertained at dinner, together with one or two other fair ones less directly connected with art. They had now retired from the feast chamber to an adjoining room, whither most of the men had followed, and were smoking. Half a dozen men, intent on their talk and on their wine, remained at the dinner table, Tristram and Malory among them.

'The fun of this sort of thing gets poorer as one gets older,' the poet said, nodding his head in the direction of the room where the others were laughing. 'I believe, after all, your virtuous man who goes to church regularly, and has a faithful wife and a

suburban villa, and children to welcome him home at night, has the best of it. A man should marry before it is too late. If I were you I should marry. Excuse me, Malory, I am not joking, though this sentiment may surprise you.'

'Why don't you marry yourself?' Dick asked.

'Ah, Malory, you ask an impossibility. Discover a woman to my taste, and I promise you I would marry her instantly, if she would consent. I will describe her. She must be exceedingly beautiful, beguiling in manner, brilliant in mind. She must be capable not only of winning my love but of keeping it. She must be my superior in everything except, let me say, in verse—I could not admit her as a rival there. She must attract the admiration of other men—

this is important. And while she is pure as the snow on an inaccessible mountain peak, she must be full of passion and warmth, and must constantly keep me on the verge of jealousy. She must love and admire me, but make almost a concession of her love, and keep me in a perpetual state of wooing.'

'Oh,' said Dick, 'you would combine, in one woman, a nunnery, a ladies' college, and a harem.'

'As I observed,' continued Tristram, seriously, 'I ask for an impossibility. The women who present themselves are not to my taste. Of mere beauty of face a few weeks would weary me. I should require a new style of beauty as much as I want a new charm of scenery. An intellectual woman without beauty would be better as a friend than as a wife, while mere virtue without

other charms is like an empty fire-proof safe.'

Dick laughed appreciatively, and filled Tristram's glass.

'And suppose,' he went on, 'I found such a lady, and suppose I could induce her to marry me,—what right should I have to do so? Look at my record for the last twenty years, and fancy my appropriating such a woman. A man should be able to come to her with a clean conscience, and, what is more important, sound lungs, strong nerves, and a good digestion. The last is almost more important than a clean conscience—it means good temper. But you could give a fair account of yourself in these details; for you it is not too late.'

'The woman you describe,' answered Dick, 'is the creation of a jaded mind. She

is a monster ; there is no harmony about her. You have forgotten all about love, I believe. Think of your own first poems. You love a woman, and her faults become a joy to you.'

'Quite true ; at first they are a joy to you ; afterwards they turn and rend you. You ought to have no difficulty in finding a wife to your taste. You have faith in woman still ; I envy you ; I had it once. I have lost my taste for a simple good woman, just as my palate has ceased to approve simple honest fare. You will excuse my remarking that you are going the way to lose it also. You see I am like Dives warning his younger brothers.'

'I tell you, Tristram,' said Dick, warmly, 'I don't mean to marry, and there is no reason why I should choose your alternative course. There are women who are too good

for us; I have no intention of seeking one. And these girls here whom you look upon as created for your amusement, whose weakness men take advantage of, I say they are better than we. I have done with the high and noble. I cast in my lot with the sinful and disappointed. If I married at all, I would take one of these and stand by her weakness and folly.'

'Good heavens, boy, what are you saying? you are drivelling, Malory. The wine has got into your head. Oh dear, oh dear, just listen to Cleopatra laughing' (the ladies were known by their pictorial names); 'that silly little cackling laugh of hers is maddening; no doubt you youngsters think it charming. I suppose my blood is getting cold. I require more wine than you. I really apologise for attempting to lecture. I

have had my innings; I have followed my inclinations; I have sought my own pleasure, and, now that I am tired of the life, I say it is worthless. But I am interested in your work, and your work is not progressing; you are drifting. This life of ours does not suit you. Perhaps these women are getting hold of you. Women and good work don't go together. If your relationship with a woman does not bring out the best in *her*, it will bring out the worst in *you*.'

Dick replied hotly: 'These girls who are looked down upon, are they any worse than the ladies whose virtue is protected by the British constitution and the British god, Respectability, and cramped by custom till it is as deformed as a Chinese woman's foot? Their ideals are not high, but they have no chance. I am sick of high motives, and

ideals, and noble aims. The few people who can achieve them must stand alone, apart from the mass of humanity. I count it ignoble to seek to be noble. If you have the power to be so while your fellows cannot, it is deserting them. I would rather remain with the sinful and be damned.'

'Easy enough to do that,' replied Tristram, shrugging his shoulders. It was no use arguing with this hot-headed fellow.

Coffee had been sent into the adjoining room. Tristram went in, leaving Dick to meditate at the dinner table. A girl's laugh reminded him unpleasantly of a fact he had almost forgotten whilst talking to the poet: Connie was in the next room, and the man who had introduced her to the entertainment was Eustace, his old schoolfellow, the golden-

haired little fellow who had wept at his castigation.

Dick had seen a good deal of her lately; he was growing more and more interested in her; he saw the dangers which beset her, and was anxious. He was angry, almost jealous, at her intimacy with Eustace. Connie had indeed spread her toils for the boy; she was amusing herself with him, but that was all. An influence of which Dick knew nothing held her somewhat in check. She had a true lover. Robert Strong, Dick's friend, the hard-headed Socialist, had been completely conquered by her. His introduction to her, some six months back, had been the knocking down of a man on her behalf, outside a music hall, and a consequent fortnight's imprisonment. When he came out Connie had endeavoured to show her gratitude.

Strong's intense admiration and devotion to her flattered her vanity; and though she could not altogether understand him, she admired him for his masterfulness and for the sacrifices he made to help his poorer fellow-workmen. She refused to marry him; but Strong, whose extreme principles at this time made him scornful of laws and customs, regarded her as his wife. As his wife she had lived with him, and he had been happy for a few months. But she could not exist without excitement; recently she had got an engagement at an East End music hall, and had gone to lodgings of her own, and only visited him occasionally. He, who was a man of iron with other men, was a child in her hands; he was unable to influence her, and had to content himself with watching over her to the best of

his power, and hoping sadly for better days.

When Dick joined the others, nearly all the men were smoking, and some of the girls had lighted cigarettes. A young burlesque actress, brought by an art critic, was in the middle of the room amusing the company by mimicking the bearing and manner of several friends, absent and present. Laughter and applause were abundant.

Humphry Wrixon and the Professor, on their arrival, heard these sounds of festivity, and conjectured that there was a party. Of its nature Humphry inquired of the man who opened the door for them, and was informed that it was composed of 'artists and litery gents and Bo'emians.' The Professor was in favour of retiring and choosing another evening for their visit, but Humphry, anti-

cipating fun, would not hear of it, and sent up their names.

A sudden pause followed their entrance. Dick jumped up in consternation. Every one scrutinised the new-comers, but Humphry walked across the room the picture of smiling ease. 'I perceive,' he murmured to himself, 'that the Bo'emians are ladies.' 'Well, my dear nephew, we thought we would give you a surprise. I came up to town rather suddenly. Pray, present us to your host.'

Dick introduced them to Tristram uncomfortably. 'I wish to heaven you had told me you were coming,' he said in an undertone to Humphry.

Tristram enjoyed the situation; he welcomed them with grave courtesy. 'If we had known you were in town we might have had the pleasure of seeing you at dinner.

The bond of our union to-night is the picture you see on the easel; we have met to praise it and to drink confusion to the hanging committee of the Royal Academy for rejecting it. Professor Wintersea, it is a great pleasure to make your acquaintance. Your reputation has reached even so unscientific a person as myself.'

The Professor was greatly embarrassed. 'I am much obliged to you—very good of you indeed'—he glanced vaguely at the picture—'a very remarkable production; very brilliant indeed.'

Every one was listening; an audible titter from one of the young ladies broke the silence.

'You perceive, Professor,' said Humphry, 'that these gentlemen require, and take, a little relaxation sometimes after the strain of

artistic and literary work. We expected to find you, Dick, alone, studying the lectures of Mr. Flaxman. It is pleasant to discover, eh, Wintersea? that the working mood is not always upon him.'

'Exactly, exactly,' replied the Professor; 'it shows how many departments the human mind possesses. It is very desirable; an occasional indulgence is no doubt followed by a resilience.'

'Well, I'm sure!' said Cleopatra; and the Professor, thoroughly bewildered by the laugh which this simple remark excited, took the seat which was offered to him. He was gradually taking in the scene, and became more and more uncomfortable. The ladies perplexed him most. He had heard much, latterly, of strong-minded women who claim the friendship of men, and concluded that

the ladies present belonged to that advanced guard. Humphry was taking the scene in also, and grew more and more amused.

Dick hardly said a word; he was ill at ease; he sought for a scheme to get the Professor away, but saw mischief in Humphry's eye.

Though general conversation was resumed, a breach for the time had been made in the evening's festivities. Humphry and Tristram held the talk.

'I suppose,' Humphry was saying, 'that, like everything else, painting is greater to-day than it has ever been before. The picture on the easel, which we celebrate to-night, seems to me a better one than any landscape of more than a hundred years back which I ever saw.'

A young artist, who had been enjoying his

wine, struck in: 'Do you seriously think, old chap, that I'm better than Claude; because, if so, I should like to know more of you. You admire my work, don't you, Diana?' he asked, turning to his fair neighbour.

Tristram caught the young man's eye and silenced him. The Professor looked at the door; he was considering the possibility of flight.

'And yet,' said Humphry, 'this interesting art, I suppose, cannot hope for a future.'

'That is serious news for us,' said another. 'Now, why do you think so?'

'I should have thought,' answered Humphry, 'that, as with other forms of handicraft, machinery would be your enemy. The future of photography seems to me simply gigantic; we should lose much, of course, but should we not gain more?—in truthfulness and

accuracy, for example. And think of the masses! I take it that, in the future, we shall have an equalisation of wealth which will check the paying large sums for pictures; and how nice it will be when, for a simple shilling, a hardworking waiter or constable may have an admirable and accurate picture of his wife done by some machine power, instead of the portrait he now hangs up, which, no doubt, cost him five pounds; I mean the one in which she is dressed in blue silk, and wears the gold chain which she has borrowed from her sister who married the publican.'

'*I* should be very sorry to borrow anything from anybody when *I* was going to be photoed, I must *say*,' said one of the young ladies, who was listening.

'I am sure you would, madam,' agreed Humphry, '"beauty unadorned," you know.'

Few were quite certain as to whether the stranger were a hopeless Philistine or a scoffer, he spoke with such gravity; but it was evident that he was extremely self-possessed, and was disposed to be agreeable. His last gallant speech provoked great laughter.

Tristram was wondering with some apprehension how much longer Humphry would be allowed to monopolise attention and interfere with the ordinary course of the evening's revelry. His friends were gentlemen, and he had little fear, even on such an evening as this, that any one of them would be discourteous to Humphry or Wintersea; but there were young men there who had drunk a good deal, and he was sure that before long the fun would take some form which would dismay, at least, the Professor. Dick's anxiety had been brief; wine had made him reckless.

He had been horrified at their arrival at first ; now he did not care what happened, but he was ready to quarrel with any one who was disrespectful to his visitors.

Tristram took up the conversation with Humphry. 'You interest me, Mr. Wrixon, when you say that we are superior to our ancestors, not only in art, but in everything else. Now I believe we have gone back. There is less nobility in men than there was.'

'Do you think so really?' said Humphry. 'I should have thought there was not a single point in which we were not superior to our ancestors. Not to speak of all the obvious advancement in knowledge, and the blessings of civilisation, I should have thought that in mere personal qualities, in physical strength and size, in the beauty of our women (if we may trust the portraits of the great masters

you admire—and a picture usually flatters; when I see a lady with two chins in a portrait I always conclude she had three), and in character, in morality too, we are very far ahead of any previous time.'

'Yes, yes,' said Dick, impatiently; 'we have gained something, I suppose, in the comforts of civilisation, in luxury, in peace; but we are worse men than our fathers. As Tristram says, we have lost nobility. We have peace; but what sort of men do we breed in the times of peace? Look at our pigmies in manufacturing districts! I don't care twopence for the blessings of civilisation. Look at fellows like ourselves who think about pleasure, and look at the whole race of weak-kneed city clerks and commercial gentlemen who have not a spark of heroism left in them, poor devils! They cannot help

it: there is nothing to bring the heroism out of the race now.'

'Do you think so?' protested Humphry; 'I think they are very noble in their way.'

'Not you,' said Dick.

'And there are other forms of heroism besides running a man through with a sword. Look how patient they are, and how they undergo privation to educate their daughters! I believe,' he continued, solemnly, 'that almost any one of us is a better man than St. Paul,—and I need not say I admire St. Paul greatly.'

'The wicked creature! what'll he say next?' whispered Connie.

'By Jove! Bless my soul, Humphry, are you serious?' cried Mr. Wintersea, startled.

'Perfectly. I don't see how we can help it; it is so much easier. Take such a simple

matter as humanity—treatment of women and animals and enemies—and compare it with that of the ancients. As to your great heroes of antiquity, my dear Dick, we simply could not know them now. Ulysses was a person we could not have admitted to our drawing-rooms.'

Tristram laughed heartily.

'Seriously, my nephew,' he concluded, 'I consider disbelief in our own age the very worst form of infidelity. I advise you to give this consideration.'

'There is a great deal of infidelity now, I am afraid,' said Connie to the Professor, next whom she was now sitting. 'Have you read *Duncan Thompson?*'

Duncan Thompson was an amiable novel of the day which had gained considerable notoriety, chiefly from the fact that the hero's

theological views were mildly unorthodox. It happened that the Professor had taken it up, but had found it so wearisome that he had not finished it.

'I tried it; I read part of it,' said he, 'but I could not go on.'

'Ah,' said Connie, 'I know. I have heard that many people find it very unsettling.'

Tristram shouted with laughter; the idea of *Duncan Thompson* unsettling the Professor's faith was very funny.

'For goodness' sake listen!' said some one in the background. 'Connie and the Professor are talking theology. Come—this is an evening to remember.'

'Ah, it was hardly on that account,' stammered Wintersea, anxious and unable to explain.

'You thought the hero too pi?' suggested Connie.

'Pi! dear me, I hardly understand.' He was not acquainted with the slang abbreviation of the word pious. 'Ah, yes. Bless my soul! of course, very good, I see—an insoluble character, an enigma, one who bears the same relation to his surroundings as the diameter to the circumference of a circle.' He began to entertain a high opinion of his companion's intellect. 'You are a student of mathematics?' he asked.

'I have not gone very far,' replied Connie, conscious that the conversation was amusing the listeners, and willing to continue it with a show of seriousness.

'Ah, well,' smiled the Professor, 'but you are a student.'

'I haven't much time for reading; my

profession is art. This young lady is in the same business. She is in the Grosvenor this year—Number 291.'

'Really,' said Wintersea, bowing gallantly. 'I am very glad to hear of your success. I must pay a visit to that excellent institution and find out your work—291.' He made a memorandum of the number.

These Bohemian women are not so unpleasant after all, he thought. He had not been more uneasy in her presence than with other ladies. He appreciated gifts in woman, and was an advocate for her admission to the professions of men; her mere feminine charms he never noticed until they were categorically pointed out to him.

He had now a general impression that his companion was good-looking, and she was certainly most agreeable. He found his

shyness departing, and he was commencing further conversation with her when some tumult in another part of the room again filled him with misgiving, and caused him to consult his watch and Humphry's face.

But Humphry was not disposed to stir; he was now asking for a song, and his suggestion was received with acclamation.

'Perhaps you sing yourself, sir?' a lady asked, innocently.

'A little, my dear,' replied Humphry.

'And would you sing? Oh, *do!*'

'Oh, yes, do!' said everybody.

'Well,' he consented, 'perhaps after some others have made a beginning, I might do so.'

'My good uncle, are you mad?' cried Dick. 'Why, Tristram, he never sang a song in his life.'

'G—good gracious! Humphry,' exclaimed the Professor, aghast.

But neither Dick nor Wintersea knew half the accomplishments of Humphry; there was a time when his songs had been popular in a merrier and more honest, if a rougher company than the present.

One of the younger men sang a German student's song with a chorus, which was heartily shouted. The evening was about to begin in earnest. A serious song followed, called 'For ever and for ever.' The Professor's politeness made him feel it a duty to express approbation.

'Very charming,' said he; 'very excellent. "For ever and for ever," exactly, "For ever and for ever."'

A brief interval followed. Connie's arm

silently stole round the Professor's waist, not unobserved by others.

'G—G—God bless my soul!' he cried, jumping up and turning pale; 'this is—this is very unusual. My dear Dick, I must really——' He retired hastily to the other end of the room, in a perfect storm of laughter.

'Damn you all!' said Dick, in a huge passion. 'Is this the way you treat your guests? Come, Professor, we won't stay here a moment longer,' and taking Wintersea's arm, he hurried him out of the room.

Humphry smiled blandly; he went over to Tristram to say good-bye.

'I am awfully sorry this has happened,' apologised Tristram. 'I am greatly vexed that Professor Wintersea is offended. I think he is a dear old boy. I hope you will

be able to explain to him. You know what evenings like this mean.'

'It is not worth a moment's anxiety,' replied Humphry. 'Thank you for a delightful hour. I ought not to have brought my friend here to-night. Good-bye, gentlemen—and—ladies'—he bowed to the room generally—'I hope you will spend a pleasant evening, and I look forward to the pleasure of meeting you all again.'

CHAPTER XI

CHELSEA TO WESTMINSTER

After saying good-bye to his relations, Dick walked up and down in front of the house. The street was quiet ; the dark space of sky above the houses bright with stars. He began to think calmly about the scene he had just quitted. While he was meditating Connie came to the door with her hat on, and seeing him, ran to his side.

'I thought I'd find you,' she said. 'Are you going to forgive me? Please!'

'It's not you I'm angry with, Connie; it's the others and myself.'

'I behaved very bad to the old bird, but I'm very, very sorry.'

'It's our fault,' said Dick. 'We have no business to let you spend evenings like this with us. We ought to treat you like ladies, and then you would treat us as ladies would.'

Connie was submissive for once. 'I wish I could be like that. I'm a bad lot; I wish I was better.'

She perceived the way in which Dick was to be attracted. She spoke with an air of sincerity, almost deceiving herself—him completely.

'Connie, something must be done,' he said. 'We must have a talk. I mean to get you out of this sort of life. I mean to get away from it myself. Look here; are you ready to go? I'll take you, and we can talk.'

'I promised Mr. Eustace.'

'I'm going with you,' said Dick.

She took his arm, and they walked down the quiet street towards the river.

'I'm glad to be along with you,' said Connie; 'it does me good. I was afraid you were going to give up being pals. You hardly spoke to-night. That's why I was so cheeky to your friend. If you go back on me I don't care what I do, and you're the only one as I mind.'

Dick looked at her. Her face was very beautiful. A definite purpose as to this girl was shaping itself in his mind. He had spoken to Tristram recklessly about marrying a girl from her class—that was in a spirit of defiance—now he was thinking of it in the spirit of the reformer.

'I shall stand by you, you may depend on that, Connie,' he said.

They came to the river-side, and stood for a short while looking at the dark water. There was a jetty close by at which the river steamers called. Some rowing-boats were bobbing in the ripples at its side. In obedience to a whim of Connie, who was always on the alert for novelty, Dick arranged with one of the boatmen, who was smoking his pipe on the jetty, to row them down the river as far as Westminster Bridge. He laughed at Connie, but the idea pleased him too.

The last steamer had gone, and the river was very quiet. Connie and Dick sat together in the stern. The boatman understood them to be lovers, and did not attempt conversation.

The sky, which had seemed a narrow channel above the street, was now as a great open sea; dark reaches of the river were broken by lines of trembling gold where the lights on the bridges were reflected; the night wind blew warm south-west down stream with a message of the country and the English spring; the roar of the streets was far away; the splash of the oars and the ripple of the water pleasant to hear.

'I wonder why you should trouble about me,' Connie said, after a while. 'What's it matter to you whether I'm straight or not? no one else cares.'

'No, that's just it; it's because no one else cares.'

'Oh,' she answered in a disappointed tone, 'that's the only reason.'

'No, not the only reason. But they *don't*

care, Connie; not one of them cares a straw for you really.'

'I'm not so sure about that,' she replied, forgetting her part for a minute.

'Well, they don't act as if they did; they're amusing themselves only.'

'And maybe they're amusing me. But I know what you say's right. I suppose I shall be sorry some day, but I may as well enjoy myself while I have the chance. If what you say's true, and nobody cares for me, why should I trouble?'

'I care,' said Dick; 'I care tremendously.'

'And there may be one or two besides. There's your friend, Mr. Eustace; he's very kind; he's coming to-morrow evening to take me out to——'

Dick got angry. 'He shall do no such thing, Connie. Look here, promise me you

won't go with him or with any of them. It will end badly. I say you must not go with him. He's playing the fool with you.'

'And what are you doing, Dick?' she asked, quietly.

'It's quite time we both of us made a complete change in our ways, Connie,' he said, after a pause, 'a real, total change. I think I shall chuck art and go abroad somewhere where the life is honester and healthier and simpler. Would you like to go too, with me?'

'Yes,' said Connie, eagerly.

'What! far away to some out-of-the-world settlement where there are no theatres, and no shops, and no excitement?'

'I should be with you,' said Connie.

He put his arm round her affectionately. The boatman discreetly turned towards the

bows, and pushed instead of pulling at the oars.

'We will be married at once—as soon as it can be arranged—within a fortnight, Connie,' he said; 'and it must be kept secret. I don't want my people, I don't want any one, to know yet. I wish to show you to them after you have had a few years' change from your present surroundings. After a while we'll come back, and then I'll take you to them. We'll face the world together and defy it—and win.' He found that Connie was sobbing. 'My poor girl, what is it?' he asked.

'I'm not worth it,' she said; 'you don't know me. I'm a bad lot.'

'Yes, I know what you mean. Think of the future, not of the past.'

'You don't know half, or you would not keep your arm round me now.'

'I tell you I do,' said Dick; 'and all that is going to be forgotten, and all the future is going to be different and bright.'

Triumph, gratitude, shame, affection for the man were all surging in Connie's breast. She said nothing, but stared over the edge of the boat at the black water. There was a flash of light and a pulsing on the river. A little steamer passed and threw bright rose hues from her port-light on the girl. Then they had the dark river and the starlight once more to themselves.

Dick was drawn to Connie with something more than the affection of a protector. She knew the symptoms of tone and manner, and was well pleased with the change.

'It's not only to reform me, but do you love me for myself, Dick?' she whispered.

'Yes, Connie, for ever,' he answered; and

so their troth was plighted, and Dick's destiny decided.

But even then, as the boat dropped down on the tide, and they sat together hand in hand, their thoughts were not all of each other. There was a picture of a desperate man before Connie's eyes—of a sweet-hearted, unstained, and unstainable girl before Dick's. She was thinking with fear of Robert Strong —he with a strange regret of Margaret Longfield.

CHAPTER XII

HOLY MATRIMONY

A FORTNIGHT later Dick and Connie were married at a registry office in London. In three days they were to sail for America. In the meantime he had paid a hurried visit to Farinder, and told them his intention of making a break in his present life, and roughing it in the west for a year or two. Humphry was neither altogether surprised nor displeased; he believed this would be the best means of clearing his atmosphere and removing his discontent, and that he would return to his work in a healthier frame

of mind. The old man was sadly disappointed. Margaret Longfield was anxious, but said nothing. Dick avoided her, she thought; it was not a happy visit.

Dick had kept his intended marriage secret, but on the day before it took place he called on Robert Strong with the intention of telling him. He felt sure of his warm sympathy, his complete approval of the step which he had taken, and this he could feel of no other. He longed for the confidence of a friend, now that he was leaving home and breaking with his old associations; but, unhappily for him, Strong was not at home, and he had to satisfy his desire for comradeship in a letter.

It was a disappointment to Connie not to be married in a church. Whenever the thought of marriage had entered her head

she had pictured herself clothed in white, wreathed with orange blossom ; the Wedding March had sounded for her as she walked down the church ; slippers and rice had followed her carriage ; for in her wedding picture the husband she had seen had not been a poor man. But she had a good reason for not pressing Dick to acknowledge their marriage openly, and for making no objection to their immediate departure from England. She was fond of him in her way, and she understood that he was making a sacrifice in marrying her. She was not entirely without conscience, and her relationship with Strong was a trouble to her, less on Strong's account than Dick's. She knew Strong to be his valued friend ; she trembled to think of what might happen if her secret were known, and

for this she was glad they were going away.

On the day of the wedding they went to a village in Surrey, Brighton and other places which Connie suggested having been rejected by Dick, who was fearful of meeting acquaintances. It was a pretty little hiding-place in the woodland; the old-fashioned gabled inn was set in a garden which sloped on one side to the open fields, and had the curve of a little stream for its boundary. It was an ideal nook for romantic young lovers, not for this pair, though for a day or two Connie was prepared to approve the seclusion.

An elderly couple, with a mutual interest in deep-sea fishermen and botanical specimens, were the only other visitors at the inn. At dinner they were attracted by the young people, and were confirmed in their opinion

that they were newly married by hearing Dick ask Connie if she knew anything about cookery. After dinner the lady spoke to Connie with the affectionate interest which matrons give to brides, and Connie responded modestly. Dick was well pleased with her; for once she was simply dressed in white; her figure, her dark eyes and hair had never looked so attractive, he thought, and he expressed his appreciation.

They went into the garden, and sat in a summer-house at the edge of the brook. The blue May day had passed through a golden evening to rosy twilight; the scent of the meadows and of the garden was in the air; a thrush still sang for them. Dick and Connie sat hand in hand; they played the part of lovers very well.

Dick fancied that he had married Connie

to save her, but without doubt if she had been plain instead of handsome he would not have done so. Her attractions as a young woman had as much to do with his decision as his own quixotic nature and his spirit of defiance. There was no true love between them ; the love-light had never been in their eyes. He was drawn to her ; but it was not by love, for love is impossible when there is not a solid basis of comradeship ; nor by passion, for passion is impossible when the bond is not between soul and soul. Sex and sentiment were aping the parts of passion and comradeship, a disguise which is always found out before long. For the clasp of hands, the touch of lips, what are these in themselves? But when they are an expression, an answer, from the soul of one beloved, what are they not? What

wealth could the world give in exchange for them?

From the change in her manner, which he had already noticed, Dick was hopeful that in the course of a year or two Connie would be a wife whom he could exhibit without apprehension. He was thinking of this when she asked him how long they were likely to be away from England.

'I should think a couple of years, at the outside,' he answered.

'And then you'll take me to your folks? You won't be ashamed of me?'

'No, proud.'

'What a lark it will be! I wonder what my Uncle Humphry will think about it. Shall I have to call him uncle? And when we come back I'm to be a lady—pals with your lady friends, Miss Longfield and the

Irish princess. You won't be ashamed of me before them?'

'What nonsense! of course not,' replied Dick, with a tone of vexation in his voice, which Connie noticed.

'I'm jealous,' she said. 'I believe you used to be in love with one of them. I'll be even with her when I find out which of 'em it was.'

The subject was unpleasant to Dick; he was provokingly silent.

'After all,' observed Connie, 'it's you ought to be the jealous one, not me; and you don't seem to mind. I don't believe you love me.'

'Yes, I do, Connie; that's why I take you as you are.'

'No,' she continued, with some excitement, 'you don't, or it would make you mad

to think of it—to think what's been between me and others, friends of your own.'

'Don't, don't, Connie,' said Dick, pained. 'I told you it was best to forget everything in the past. I forgive you utterly. It was to save you from all this that I married you.'

'If that's the only reason, then I wish you'd let it alone,' said Connie. She was indignant at his ready forgiveness.

'For goodness' sake be sensible, Connie,' Dick replied; 'of course I would not have married you if I had not loved you. Come, kiss and be friends.'

Connie made peace very prettily, recovered, and laughed.

'And so I'm your wife, Dick, your wife; how funny it sounds! Till death us do part I'm to love and honour and obey. I wish we'd been married in a church too. I can't

scarcely believe it's my own finger with this wedding ring on it; and you were a dear to buy me this keeper when you said we should want all our cash for necessaries. Oh, I wish we hadn't to go on Thursday. No, Dick, I won't be stupid any more and say things. We'll only think about each other now. Yes, I want another; I shall make you too proud for anything, but you do kiss nicely.'

The twilight slipped into night. Connie went to her room; Dick lighted a cigar and walked up and down the garden. Presently he went in; the sitting-room was empty. A minute afterwards he heard a rapid stride on the path; the door opened and Strong entered. He was deadly pale. When he saw Dick he was so agitated that he could not speak. Dick was utterly astonished.

'Strong!' he cried. 'What on earth——'

'Thank God, I've found you,' said Strong.

'What's the matter?' Dick asked. 'Sit down; you're ill. I'll get you some brandy.'

'I've come for my wife,' said Strong.

'Your wife!'

'For Connie. She's my wife if she's any one's. I've come for her.'

'What the devil are you talking about?' cried Dick. 'Either you're a raving madman or you're a hopeless idiot.'

Strong forced himself to be calm.

'Has she — has Connie told you anything? Did you know she knew me?'

'No, I don't believe she does. You're mad, Strong.'

'No,' said Strong, 'I thought not from your letter. I knew you were honourable. She's deceived you, Mr. Malory. If you

knew what she'd been to me you wouldn't have married her. Go and ask her.'

It was Dick's turn to be agitated. 'Go on,' he said; 'if you've anything more to say, out with it.'

'She's as much my wife,' cried Strong, passionately, 'as if she'd been to church with me. I wanted her to marry me. She would not; but it came to the same thing—she lived with me. After that what difference does it make whether or not you go to church or a registry office? She's your wife by law, but she's nothing to you,—nothing unless you love her better than I do, and by God I know you don't. She's my girl.'

A terrible expression came into Dick's eyes.

'I know by your letter why you married her,' Strong continued; 'and if you'd known

you wouldn't. It's my business to save her, not yours. She's nothing to you, she's everything to me. It won't break your heart to lose her. It will kill me.'

'If you consider her your wife you might have looked after her a bit better,' said Dick.

'Damn you,' said Strong. 'What chance had I when gentlemen as you call yourselves were playing the fool with her? I don't blame her, not one bit. Think of the temptation of a girl in our class being petted and admired and entertained by men in yours. What chance have we? You're not satisfied with robbing us of our rights and grinding us down, you come and take the pick of our women, and spoil them and turn them into harlots when you get the chance, and then some of you are for reforming them and marrying them. If you wanted to re-

form a woman by marrying her, why the devil didn't you marry one of your own class? — there are plenty to choose from who want as much reforming as any in ours.'

Dick was far too seriously impressed by the terrible situation in which he found himself to heed Strong's abuse. Indeed he was perfectly calm; he could make allowance for and understand Strong's wrath. He knew that what he had said of his relationship to Connie was true.

'It's no use making a noise,' he said; 'it's too serious. I fancy you're speaking the truth. We'll see; I'll call her.'

At the same moment Connie came into the room. She had loosened her hair, and it fell in great masses on her shoulders. When she saw Strong she gave a cry; she felt

giddy for a moment, but she did not faint nor entirely lose her self-possession.

'Connie, I have come for you,' said Strong.

She looked at Dick piteously.

'If what he says is true you'd better go with him,' said Dick.

'I told you. You said—you said you'd forgive me everything,' said Connie.

'Then it's true?'

Connie hid her face in the cushion of the sofa and sobbed.

Strong's manhood melted away at the sight of her. 'Connie dearest, I don't blame you. I love you as much as ever. It's not too late; come with me. You are my wife,' he whispered; but she took no heed.

'It's about time this infernal scene came to an end,' said Dick. 'Connie, you'd better

go to your room. Here, give me your arm ; I'll take you up. We'll talk in the garden, Strong.'

Connie rose and went to her room by herself. Dick and Strong went out.

'Now,' said Dick, 'let's have no more nonsense and abuse. It's bad enough for you, but it's a hundred times worse for me. It seems to me my life is just about wrecked.'

'You don't know what she has been and is to me,' replied Strong ; 'how I worked for her, how she loved me, or seemed to. And if it hadn't been for the temptations she got into among your friends, she'd have married me.'

'How long was she with you?'

'Two months—until almost the other day.'

'What am I to do?' said Dick, thinking aloud.

'Oh, sir,' cried Strong, 'do you love her or not?' It all depends on that. If you love her as I do, you might do more for her than I, and I could almost give her up to you, though it killed me. But if you don't—if you only married her for other reasons—Do you love her truly?'

'No,' said Dick, 'I detest the very thought of her, and I scorn myself for being such a fool as to attempt to reform her or reform anything in this accursed world.'

'Then she's my wife, not yours.'

Gradually the talk grew calmer. These men had been true friends; there was sympathy between their natures; the surface antagonism wore off; a common sorrow reunited them; each perceived the pain at the other's heart, the need for brotherhood. They paced the garden, talking earnestly till

the night was late. Strong was the more hopeful of the two; he believed so fully in the power of his own love that he did not despair of influencing Connie for good. Dick's heart was hardened; he hardly cared what became of himself or Connie; he determined to have nothing more to do with her. He saw that Strong loved her desperately, and he would not have come between him and her even if he had cared more for her; but now she had no longer any attraction for him; she repelled him, and he felt she had ruined him.

Connie remained in her room in a state of miserable suspense. She saw by the way Dick had looked at her that there was little hope of beguiling him, but she did not entirely give up the game as lost. After a while she could bear the uncertainty no

longer. She opened the window, and as the men's figures drew near she called to Dick.

'Come to me, just one moment,' she said; 'I must speak to you.'

'Don't,' whispered Strong; 'she'll conquer you; you won't be able to resist her.'

'I'm going,' he answered, 'but it's only to say good-bye to her for ever.'

When he was inside the door Connie flung her arms round him. 'Dick, don't give me up; I love you only. You said you'd forgive me everything.'

'Well, if it's any consolation to you, I'll forgive you, or try to,' said he.

'Stay with me, Dick. I'm your wife, your real wife, and always must be. Send him away; I'll be true to you.'

Even then, when the attraction which she had previously had for him had ceased, he

was not entirely unmoved; he could not speak harshly.

'You are my husband,' she said.

'Strong is your husband,' he answered; 'I have come to say good-bye to you. You are nothing—nothing to me any more.'

'Is it because of Strong—because you know he cares? Don't you love me?'

'No,' said Dick, 'I never loved you.'

Connie's eyes flashed. 'Here,' she said, 'take your ring. I won't have it.'

She went to the window and flung the ring out into the garden; then she threw herself on to the bed and burst into tears.

'Good-bye,' Dick said. 'If you want to make up a bit for the harm you have done, go back to Strong and be a good wife to him. I'm going abroad by myself. You won't hear of me again.'

Thus our young couple ended their wedding-day.

Dick had a few more words with Strong. He told him that he left Connie in his hands; he had done with her utterly. He said that he would leave some money at his bank for her use in case of need, and would send him an address in America to which he might write. They shook hands and parted — Strong to keep watch beneath Connie's window till morning; Dick to walk to London. Three days afterwards he sailed for America.

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